

Charles Leland Webber

Pioneer Army Aviator

by Frank Kent Rodgers



*People who are never completely forgotten
never completely die.¹*

On a summer day several years ago, while walking in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park, 40 miles east of San Diego, California, I came upon a monument consisting of a World War I *Liberty* airplane engine mounted on a stone-and-concrete base. Set in the base was a bronze plaque that bore the following inscription:

"IN MEMORY OF COL. F.C. MARSHALL AND 1ST LT. C.L. WEBBER WHO FELL AT THIS SPOT DEC. 7, 1922."

The monument stood high on a hillside, yet someone had carried sand, cement, picks, and shovels from below to build it. They must have cared deeply for these men. Who were Marshall and Webber, and why did they die here? Following are answers to these questions for Lt. Webber, the pilot.

Youth—Charles Leland Webber was born on January 15, 1896, at Mosca, Colorado, the second of four children born to Grace and Sherwood Webber. With his mother, father, sister, and two brothers, he moved regularly as his father's ministerial duties took the Webbers from one Colorado town to another. Blue-eyed, red-haired, and sturdy, he loved sports and excelled in football, basketball, and track. He made friends easily, and he was known as a willing boy who pitched into any job and did more than he was asked to do.^{2 3}

In 1912, the Webbers moved to Denver, where Lee attended North Denver High School and was elected president of the class of 1915. After graduating, he entered the University of Denver, where he was elected president of the freshman class and joined the Alpha Pi Nu fraternity.⁴

U.S. Army School of Military Aeronautics—Like many other young Americans, Webber felt called to the colors in World War I. On December 26, 1917, he enlisted in the Aviation Section of the Signal Enlisted Reserve Corps.⁵ After serving as a shop instructor, he was sent to the School of Military Aeronautics at the University of California, Berkeley, May 1918.⁶

As an aviation cadet, he wore the olive drab uniform of a

Rockwell Field as Webber found it in 1919 was no longer the busy place it had been during World War I, but it still had two active squadrons and served as a base for the Border Patrol and the Forest Patrol.

(San Diego Aerospace Museum)

Eager to add the second wing to his Army blouse, 2nd Lt. C.L. Webber, already a Fighting Observer, posed at Kelly Field before making his first solo flight on May 30, 1919.

(Webber Family Collection)

private first class, with a white band on the campaign hat to denote cadet status. In 13 busy weeks, he received preliminary instruction in the principles and theory of flight, signaling, aerial gunnery, meteorology, engines, and observation. He was taught to take apart and to reassemble an engine, an airplane, and a machine gun.^{7 8} Following is a summary of his curriculum:

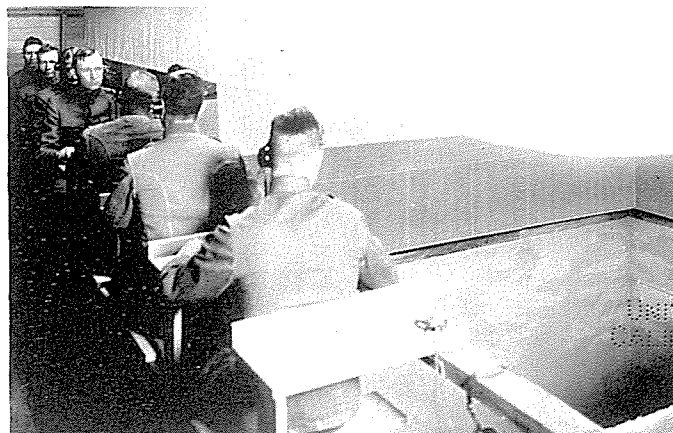
Subject	Total (hrs)	Schedule (wks)
Military Subjects	190	1-13
Sports	60	1-13
Signaling	43	1-13
Gunnery	52	3-13
Airplanes	55	3-13
Engines	59	3-13
Observation	39	8-13

His work in observation, which began in the eighth week of instruction and continued to graduation, was “regarded as a sort of culmination of the training.”⁹ For this he sat 16 feet above a miniature range that represented, as a 23x27’ painting on cloth, a section of Belgium over which Allied and German pilots were actually flying. Through intricate electrical circuits, his instructor simulated flashes of artillery fire and shell bursts. It was Webber’s task to observe the fall of the shells and to correct the aim.

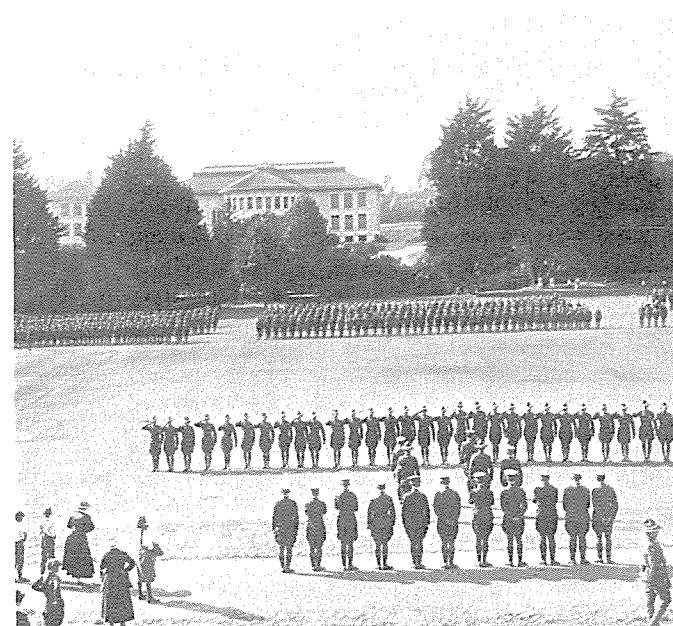
Assigned to a cadet squadron, he received intensive military training to instill the “aggressive attitude of mind and body that marks the true soldier” and to impress upon him “the necessity for having absolute faith in the statement that aviation will win the war.”^{10 11} Under calculated pressure, he gained a basic knowledge of the sciences underlying aviation and proved that he possessed the qualities needed to become a military aviator.

On August 24, 1918, he graduated with the 54 other men of cadet squadron M53. They were among the 3,032 men who successfully completed ground school at Berkeley. Seven hundred and nine men did not.¹²

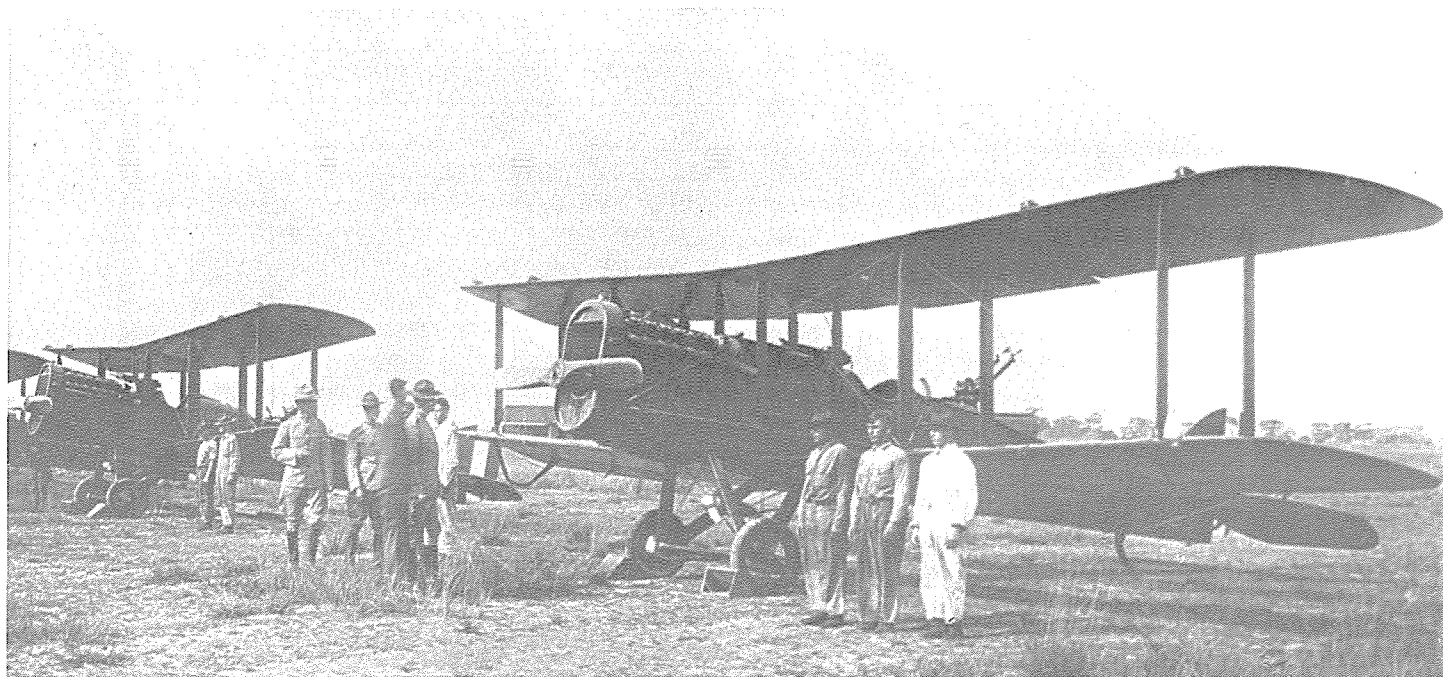
Selfridge Field—After completing ground school, Webber was sent to Camp Dick, near Dallas, Texas, to await assignment.¹³ Initially selected for training as an aerial observer—then the most important job in the Air Service—he was sent to Selfridge Field at Mount Clemens, Michigan, on October 1, 1918. Called “the best gunnery school in the world” by the head of the French aviation mission to the United States, Selfridge Field, situated on Lake St. Clair, offered eight miles of targets and 66 square miles of water over which to practice gunnery.¹⁴ Here Webber completed the four-week course for Fighting Observers, whose primary mission was to fly offensive patrols at very high altitudes. Seated at first in a dummy fuselage that simulated the rear cockpit of an airplane, he learned to store drums of ammunition, fire a machine gun, and clear stoppages and jams. When he could adjust Johnson windvane sights for deflection shooting, he practiced firing at rail-mounted, airplane-shaped targets that zipped by at 30 miles per hour. From a pier in the lake, he used incendiary ammunition to flame hydrogen-filled balloons. From the



Work in observation was regarded as the culmination of the ground school at Berkeley. Cadets practiced using a miniature range that represented a section of Belgium. Through intricate electrical circuits, their instructor simulated flashes of artillery fire and shell bursts and tested their ability to direct counterfire. These photographs show cadets in the gallery and the miniature range. (Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley)



Graduating cadets of the U.S. Army School of Military Aeronautics at the University of California, Berkeley, stood in line before the commandant. After being recognized, they faced about and watched the other cadet squadrons pass in review. In this July 1918 photograph, Webber, who graduated in August, stands somewhere among the cadet formations. (Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley)



On May 28, 1921, the Third Observation Squadron at Clark Field stood for inspection of airplanes and armament, after which seven DH-4Bs flew in formation. In this photograph Brigadier General Charles G. Treat, commanding officer of Camp Stotsenburg, inspects DH-4Bs.

(Webber Family Collection)

Webber's closest friend was John Paul Richter (right). Roommates and buddies, they served together at Rockwell Field and in the Philippines. Both men participated in the Fokker T-2 flights of 1922. After Webber's disappearance, Richter participated in the aerial search and the automobile search for Webber's airplane. Webber and Richter were photographed at Coronado in 1919.

(Webber Family Collection)

prow of a speedboat, he sank empty fuel drums. Finally taking to the air in a Curtiss JN-6HG1 *Jenny*, he strafed trench silhouettes along the shore toward New Baltimore, at Anchor Bay, and as far south as Port Huron. He completed the aerial gunnery course in 12 hours and 36 minutes of instruction and logged an additional 12 hours of practice.

His graduation exercise was a mock dogfight. Two *Jennys* climbed to an altitude of 2,000 feet before breaking into a melee that included spins, wingovers, reverses, side-slips, split turns, and barrel rolls. Standing in the rear cockpit with a Scarff ring like a giant's belt around his middle, Webber wrestled a Lewis gun that went berserk as the pilot maneuvered. The gun remained silent, and Webber registered his "hits" with a Mark I camera.

Just as Webber completed his training, the war ended. He was commissioned with the rank of second lieutenant on November 12, 1918.

Webber enjoyed the training at Selfridge Field. While serving here, he began a scrapbook, and under a photograph of the field he wrote "Paradise." Indulging a sense of humor that was never far beneath the surface, he pasted alongside it a newspaper clipping entitled "The Pessimist," which told of an officer who visited the field for his first airplane flight.¹⁵ After climbing high above Mount Clemmons, the pilot throttled the engine to glide. In the near silence, he shouted back to his passenger: "See those people down there? Fifty percent of them think that we're going to fall." "They've got nothing on us!" the officer roared back. "Fifty percent of us do, too!"



Kelly Field—Finding Army aviation to his liking, Webber decided to stay in the service after the Armistice. He remained at Selfridge Field until January 20, 1919, when he was sent to Kelly Field at San Antonio, Texas, for primary flight training. It was said during World War I, when Kelly Field was the largest airfield in the world, that all U.S. airmen went there sooner or later and took with them when they left the ideals that shaped the American Air Service.¹⁶ The pace had slackened by the time Webber arrived, but something of the spirit remained. Above all there were spring days in the endless skies of Texas and the opportunity to add the second wing to his Army blouse. He soloed on May 30, 1919, after 15 hours of instruction in a JN-4D, and he logged an additional 12 hours of practice. He also logged approximately 20 hours of flight time in the larger and more powerful de Havilland DH-4 "Liberty Plane."



Rockwell Field—On July 6, 1919, Webber was sent to Rockwell Field, San Diego, California. Rockwell Field was no longer the busy place it had been during World War I, when the pursuit school trained pilots like Jimmy Doolittle, but there were two active squadrons, the Second and the Ninth, and the Forest Patrol and the Border Patrol were in full swing.^{17 18} There was much for a young pilot to see and to learn; and many pilots thought that the field, situated on North Island in San Diego Bay, offered the finest flying conditions in the United States.¹⁹

From July 17 through August 1, Webber received further instruction in the JN-6HG1. On August 3, he made his first solo flight at Rockwell Field. On August 13, he made his first cross-country flight, flying to East Field on Otay Mesa and returning in two hours of flight time.²⁰ On August 23, he flew to Los Angeles, returning on August 25 and logging four hours and 55 minutes of flight time. On September 2, almost as an afterthought, he completed a two-hour check flight to satisfy the cross-country requirement for the Reserve Military Aviator (RMA) rating. After practicing stunts on September 15 and 26, he satisfied the requirement for the RMA pursuit classification on October 2.²¹

On October 9, he made his first flight as a test pilot, a duty to which he would later return.

On October 18, he received 15 minutes of instruction in the DH-4. He received an additional 45 minutes of instruction on October 23 and almost two hours of instruction on November 10 when, for the first time, he reached an altitude of 10,000 feet.

As of November 23, 1919, Webber had logged approximately 70 hours at Rockwell Field in the JN-6HG1 and the JN-4D and 30 hours in the DH-4. In addition to cross-country, test, and aerobatic flying, he had practiced formation flying and forced landings. Designated officer in charge (OIC) of training, he had given check rides to men training as gunners. He had met four men, Captain Robert Ervin and Lieutenants Virgil Hine, John Paul Richter, and Frank Siefert, with whom he would serve for the next three years. Hine and

Some of the pilots of the Third Observation Squadron at Clark Field in 1921 were L-R: Lts. Martin Lindgrave, Newton Longfellow, Henry I. Riley, William R. Sweeley, and Edwin Johnston; Capt. Charles T. Phillips; Lts. Charles L. Webber and Leland C. Hurd; and Capt. Clarence Medcap.
(Webber Family Collection)

Richter would become his closest friends. When the Second Observation Squadron was ordered to the Philippine Islands, he was ready.²² He sailed from San Francisco aboard the Army transport *Great Northern* on November 29. En route to the Philippines, he visited Vladivostok, Russia; Nagasaki, Japan; and Hong Kong, China.

Philippine Islands—On December 27, 1919, Webber took station at Camp Stotsenburg, Pampango, Philippine Islands. Detailed to the Third Observation Squadron, he remained there for two months, making practice reconnaissance flights in a DH-4. Soon to be named Clark Field, the Air Service station was still a rude affair lacking hangars or barracks. There were only a few airplanes, which the pilots shared. Officers and men slept in tents, which took flight in high winds.²³ Webber noted in his scrapbook that Negrito tribesmen came to the airfield to sell plants and arrows.

On February 21, 1920, Webber was sent to Fort Mills on Corregidor. Here he rejoined the Second Observation Squadron and began a new phase of his career, flying a Burgess N-9H (the “*Jenny* on a float”) from Manila Bay. Obtained from Navy surplus, the N-9s, whose heavy floats necessitated wings larger than those of land-based *Jennys*, were sluggish at best. Some said that they were two-speed airplanes: full-throttle or in the hangar.²⁴ There were no hangars or beach facilities on Corregidor, and rocks along the shore made take-offs and landings hazardous. The *Pete Puryear*, a 35-foot naval barge, stood by to rescue pilots who went into the bay.²⁵

Webber soon got the hang of it. On April 2, he flew from Fort Mills to Cavite to search for a lost boat. On April 19, 21 and 26, he flew photographic missions. During the second mission, he photographed the fortifications on Corregidor

from an altitude of 3,400 feet. During the same period, he regularly carried mail and passengers from Fort Mills to Manila and to Cavite, and he found opportunity to log several hours in the Lockheed HS-2L "Flying Boat." He logged flying time with Ervin, Richter and Siefert.

On June 11, 1920, Webber prepared a transcript of his flying log that shows the following totals and work done for the period from July 23, 1919, to June 11, 1920:

LOGGED			
Station	Airplane	Work Done	Duration (hrs:min)
Rockwell Field	JN-6H	Instruction & misc.	91:50
Camp Stotsenburg	DH-4	Instruction & practice	3:26
Fort Mills	N-9H	Instruction, observation & misc.	33:10
Fort Mills	HS-2L	Instruction, observation & misc.	4:25
Subtotal			132:51
ESTIMATED			
Station	Airplane	Work Done	Duration (hrs:min)
Selfridge Field	JN-6H	Gunnery	25:00
Rockwell Field	JN-6H	Miscellaneous	15:00
Kelly Field	JN-4D	Instruction & misc.	27:00
Kelly & Rockwell	DH-4	Artillery observation & misc.	40:00
Subtotal			107:00
Total flying time			239:51

From June 13 through June 21, Webber made six more flights in an N9H (including another flight in search of a lost boat) and logged an additional five hours of flight time.

On July 3, 1920, Webber returned to Clark Field to help establish a school for observers. Six officers from the Cavalry, the Infantry, and the Philippine Scouts were scheduled to receive three months of training in radio, photography, artillery spotting, and gunnery. Webber was needed as the gunnery instructor.

There were three hangars on the field now, and several

more were under construction. Best of all, there were 12 de Havillands, one for each pilot and two in reserve. The Air Service station was nearing completion, although a shortage of personnel still hampered operations.²⁶

When the enlisted men's barracks were completed in July, the squadron's commanding officer, Major Roy S. Brown, decreed a celebration. A chef of renown, he obtained "the two largest pigs in the islands" and saw to the construction of an outdoor stage and boxing ring. Serenaded by the band of the First Philippine Artillery, the Third Squadron and its guests put away barbecued pig and spaghetti before watching vaudevillians and amateur boxers perform under the first electric lights at Camp Stotsenburg. Webber, still under canvas, looked forward to the completion of the officers' quarters.²⁷

Just as the future seemed bright, tragedy struck. On August 12, Second Lieutenant William Maxwell crashed to his death on the Del Carmen sugar estates 15 miles from Clark Field. Forced down by engine failure, Maxwell hopped several houses but hooked a wing on a flagpole. He was the first Army pilot to be killed in the Philippines.^{28 29} Webber was a pallbearer at the memorial service.

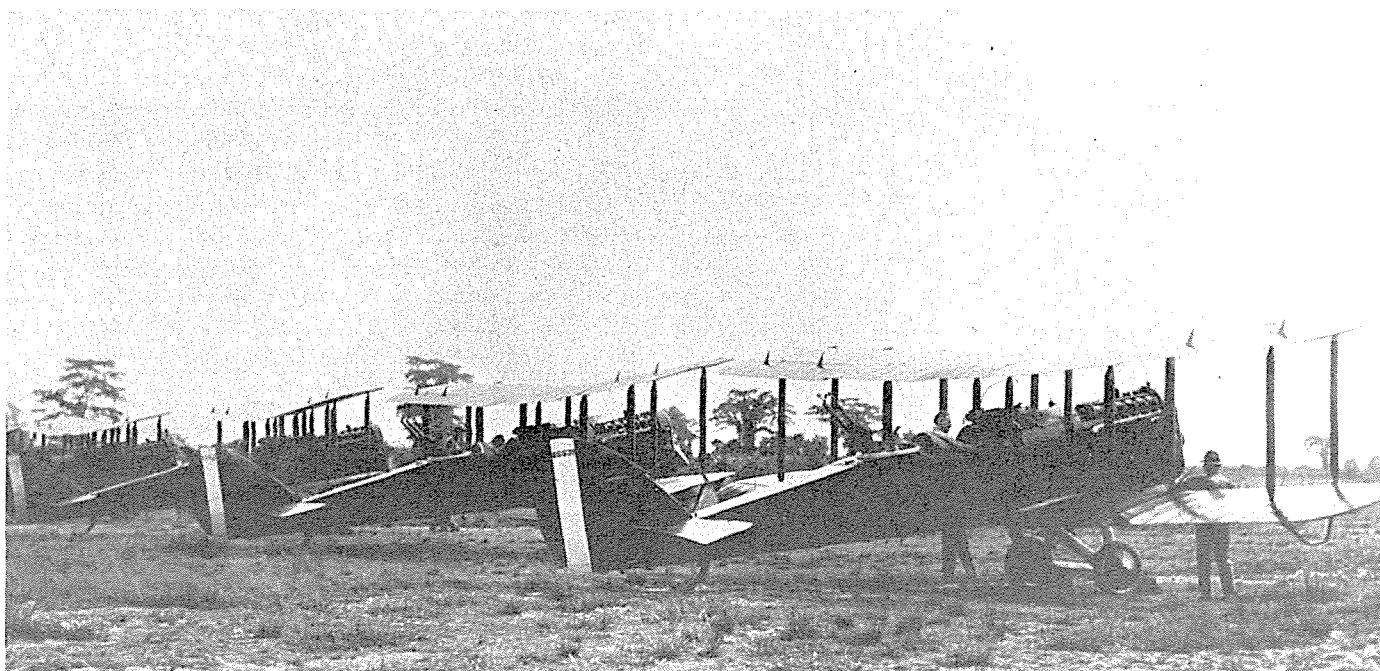
In a small group of men serving far from home, Maxwell's loss was keenly felt. As one Clark Field aviator wrote of buddies returning to the United States: "Losing old friends is like having a control wire snap at 10,000 feet."

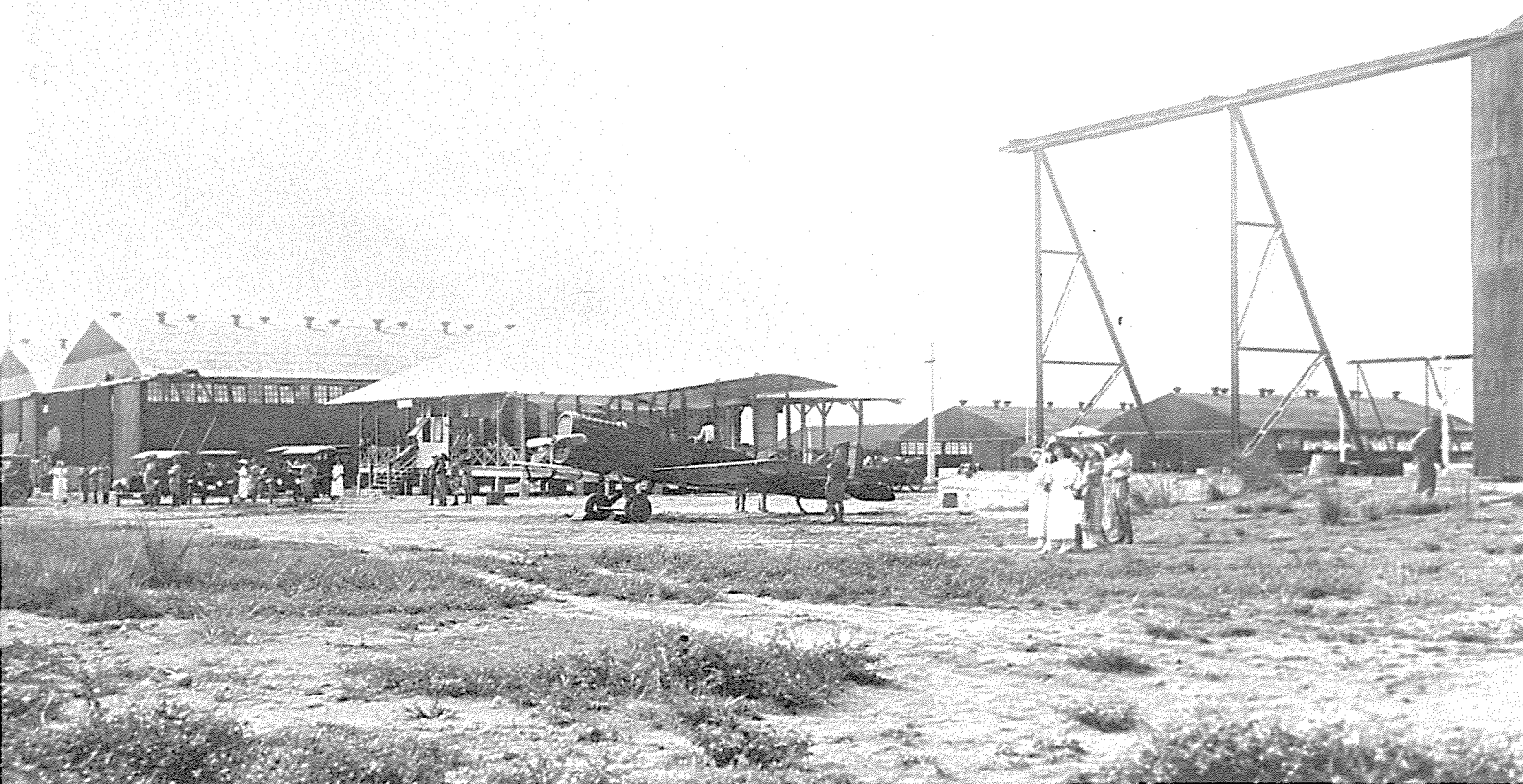
In September, heavy rains began. Flying time plummeted, and most of the officers, including Webber, went to Manila to take examinations for commissioning in the permanent establishment.³⁰ As word of the results trickled back, faces brightened until the solemn expressions of those still waiting seemed almost comical. Webber received his commission in the regular Army on October 12, 1920.³¹

Despite bad weather and the loss of a friend, the squadron soldiered on. When Captain E.L. Canady, the Air Officer, visited Clark Field in October, he was sufficiently impressed that shortly afterward he awarded them a silver cup as the Air Service squadron in the Philippines standing highest in

A. view of the DH4-Bs at Clark Field.

(Webber Family Collection)





“morale, training, and discipline.”³²

The school for observers opened the same month. As gunnery instructor, Webber showed the students how to aim a camera gun in a 100-mile-per-hour slipstream, clucked over the blurred prints they produced, and suggested push-ups in preparation for muscling the double Lewis gun around.³³

Two months later it was time to see what they had learned. On December 6, 1920, the squadron flew to Lingayen Gulf for gunnery and bombing exercises. Bivouacked in a coconut grove and flying from the beach, which everyone agreed was more beautiful than Waikiki or “even the beach at Atlantic City,” they fired 33,317 rounds of caliber .30 ammunition at trench targets along the shore and dropped 56 Mark II fragmentation bombs on a target towed two miles out in the gulf.³⁴ When they completed the exercises on December 18, Webber had logged 11 hours and 49 minutes in 15 flights. He remarked wryly that although several of the students had let drums of ammunition be blown away, at least no one had lost a gun overboard. The school for observers was reckoned a success.

On January 5, 1921, Webber joined in preparations for the Philippine Department’s annual staff rides and tactical maneuvers. Given primary responsibility for air operations, the squadron provided daily mail service from Manila to units in the field and participated in several exercises.³⁵ Webber logged almost 20 hours of flight time in 21 flights.

On January 18, he made his first flight in a pursuit plane, a SPAD-7. The SPAD was one of 12 that had arrived aboard the transport *Thomas* on December 3, 1920. Old and worn,

Following the inspection, Clark Field was opened to visitors.

(Webber Family Collection)

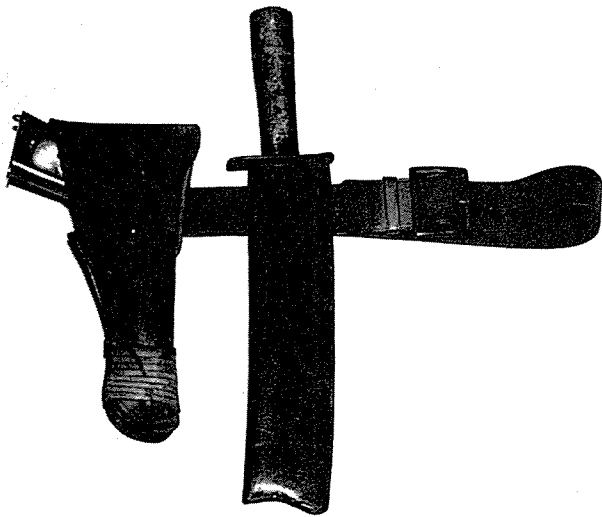
they nevertheless promised pilots accustomed to de Havillands the opportunity to fly a nimble pursuit ship, and they caused almost as much excitement as the Army nurses who arrived on the same transport.

After completing the staff rides, Webber flew in formation over the Military Carnival at Manila. The ground exhibit

An aviator in the regular Army, Webber was photographed at Clark Field in 1921.

(Webber Family Collection)





While serving in the Philippine Islands, Webber began to carry a pistol and bolo on cross-country flights. He continued to carry them after returning to the United States, and his squadron mates recovered them from the wreckage of his airplane in May 1923. (Author's Photo)

included a fully equipped DH-4B and SPAD-7 and aerial equipment including a camera gun, a parachute, and a wireless telephone. The aerial displays included message dropping contests, photographic contests, and formation flights. Webber gave a good account of himself in the message drop but lost out to First Lieutenant John Blaney, a pilot whom he had met on Corregidor.³⁶ It didn't spoil their friendship.

On February 21, 1921, Blaney and Webber drove a Dort Chummy roadster through northern Luzon. Given a six-day pass to hunt wild boar, they were told to look for emergency landing fields along the way, especially at Vigan and Beguio. Cruising over coral rock roads, they found several.³⁷ Webber collected many photographs, particularly along the Benget and Maguillan roads to Beguio, which show mountains, plowmen, women washing clothing in streams, and children with soft and ingenuous eyes. Equally curious about his profession and the world around him, he mixed them in his scrapbook with photographs of airplanes, ships, field pieces, and practice bombs. Reflecting on his role as a soldier in a strange land, he pasted alongside them the words of an Army song:

*Come listen to this, my song; I'm as happy as can be.
I'm a masher and a dasher in the U.S. Cavalree.
I stand with legs spread wide apart, bowed slightly at the knee,
And folded arms across the chest. 'Tis the pose of the Cavalree!*

CHORUS

*Then fill your glass to the brim
And brace your courage with sloe gin,
For I tell you all it is a sin to serve in the Infantree!
I'm a man of wide experience, I've been to Fort Monroe.
I've garrisoned Fort Hamilton and the Presidio.
I went out to the Philippines, and in the walled citiee,
I fought the Philippino War in the Coast Artillery.
About another soldier man I'd like to say a word.
He's neither fish nor flesh nor fowl, and yet he is a bird.
He finds his way o'er land and sea by sun and moon and star,
But he could not find his way across the island of Samar.*

Perhaps Webber saw himself in the last stanza.

The following month Webber began a six-week tour of China, where he visited Hong Kong, Peking, Canton, and Port Arthur.³⁸ Savoring the cold weather after months in the tropics, he photographed the Great Wall, temples, and huge statues of bears, lions, and horses lining the entry to the Ming Tombs. Somewhere along the way, he saw a golden opium pipe engraved with a delicate design. Captured in bright paints, emperors and dragons paraded within a glass bulb suspended from its top. Webber bought it and sent it to his sister as a keepsake. Fascinated by China, he tucked away the memory of his visit there and resolved to return one day.

Webber enjoyed a good story as much as the next man, and soon after returning to the Philippines he started one. Flying back to Clark Field from Manila, he glanced down to discover a huge, green bullfrog sitting on the rudder bar of his DH-4. Curious, he rocked the wings to see the frog's reaction. The frog was not impressed. Determined to measure the frog's aptitude for flying, Webber zoomed, looped and rolled. Some of his maneuvers were so violent that the engine began to knock and miss, but the frog never flinched. Webber limped into Clark Field and presented his (by now) pet as the newest member of the squadron.³⁹ Given the run of the officers' quarters, the frog hopped into the pages of the *Air Service Newsletter*, where it attracted rivals, most notably a Panamanian snake found coiled around the air pump in a plane at France Field.⁴⁰ The snake, being venomous, was not permitted to stay.

On May 28, the squadron stood for inspection of airplanes and armament, after which seven DH-4Bs flew in formation. Rising in celebration of Clark Field Day, they crossed and recrossed the field for 30 minutes and did reverses to the delight of a large crowd of visitors.⁴¹ An Army photographer arrived, and Webber took him up to photograph the formation.

The DH-4Bs had arrived aboard the transport *Madawaska* five months earlier. Long awaited by pilots who daily risked crashes in mountains and rice paddies, they promised greater safety by positioning the pilot behind the gasoline tank. As one wrote: "Now all they have to worry about is . . . the observers jumping in their ribs."

The following day Webber satisfied his curiosity about a local landmark. Only 12 miles from Clark Field Mount Pina-

Webber's pistol was a government-issue Colt .45.

(Author's Photo)



tuba rose mysteriously. It was said that no foreigner had scaled its peak, and Webber wondered what secrets lay hidden there. On May 29, he got a chance to find out. Sent to look for emergency landing fields between Clark Field and Lingayen Gulf, he plotted a course directly over the mountain.⁴² Skimming its peak, where his altimeter showed slightly more than 5,100 feet, he saw Negrito villages well up the slopes toward the summit. The last 500 feet jutted up steeply, covered only by cogin grass, vines and shrubs. Near the top, springs erupted into streams flowing down either side of the mountain. It was beautiful but no place for engine failure.

Webber continued to Olongapo and followed the coastline to Lingayen, noting in his log that there were few places where a pilot might land safely except near the lumber camps at Masinloc or in one of the sandy coves that notched the coastline. More than half of the time he had flown over regions of dense foliage that had not even been surveyed.

On June 23, 1921, Webber began a month's leave at Camp John Hay, Beguio. Situated amidst forests of pine and redwood, Beguio was a fine place to vacation, and Webber's timing was excellent. On July 4, 1921, a typhoon struck Clark Field. It flooded the officers' quarters and flattened the gunnery, photographic, and radio buildings.⁴³ When Webber returned on July 22, he found a runway that resembled ridged sea sand. Manure lay everywhere, an effort to encourage growth that would check erosion. Webber made leapfrog landings and took his chances.

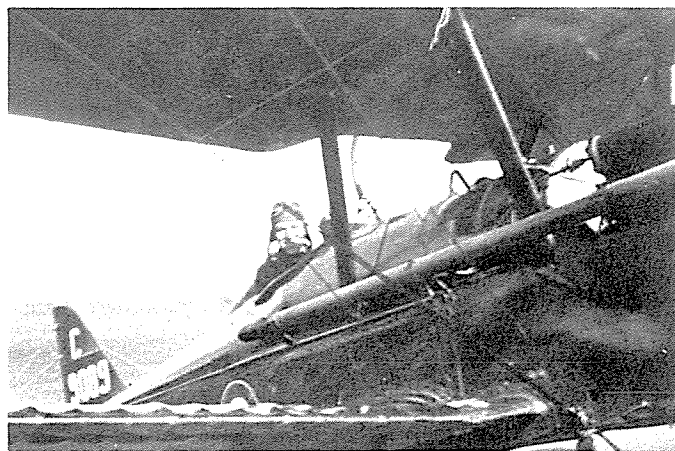
An acute shortage of supplies proved to be a greater hazard. When Major B.Q. Jones, the new Air Officer, inspected Clark Field on July 19, he found such deficiencies in the supply hangars that on August 1 he suspended all flying.⁴⁴ Webber would not fly again until August 18, and he would log only three hours and 25 minutes of flight time during the month.

When he resumed flying, Webber carried a new item of equipment. Jones had issued orders requiring any pilot in the Philippines who flew beyond gliding distance of an airfield to carry a pistol with 20 rounds of ammunition, a canteen of water, three days' rations, and a bolo.⁴⁵ It was expected that the bolo, a long, heavy, single-edged knife of Philippine origin, would permit a pilot to hack his way out if he went down in rough country.

On September 2, 1921, Major A.H. Gilkenson assumed command of Clark Field.⁴⁶ Knowing how long the pilots had been assigned to administrative duties, he instituted an ambitious refresher program, which was to be conducted as a competition. Since his object was to get the squadron ready for maneuvers with the Ninth Cavalry and the 24th Field Artillery, he selected officers from those units to train as observers and to instruct the pilots in the use of cavalry and artillery.

Continuing shortages delayed Gilkenson's plans, but by mid-September enough gasoline was available to begin. On September 13, Webber and three other pilots began a series of flights to establish standards of proficiency for future pilot refresher courses.⁴⁷ Flying de Havillands fully equipped except for bombs and pyrotechnics, they executed the following maneuvers:

1. From X, takeoff into the wind, climb at a normal angle, and spiral, gaining 1,000 feet to position over X.



While stationed at Rockwell Field, Webber regularly ferried SE-5s and SE-5As to March Field.
(Webber Family Collection)

2. Make two figure-eights with intersection of loops over X, gaining 1,500 feet.

3. Make two consecutive circles to the right over X and two similar circles to the left, gaining 500 feet.

4. At an altitude of 3,000 feet fully throttle the motor (assume a dead stick) and land, trying to stop the plane as near X as possible.

First Lieutenant Edwin Johnson, a test pilot who had recently arrived from McCook Field, Dayton, Ohio, recorded the best time: eight minutes and 30 seconds.

On September 19, Gilkenson sent Webber and four other pilots to Lingayen Gulf to determine whether the squadron might conduct gunnery exercises there, but debris on the beach prevented them from landing.⁴⁸ On September 29, noting that Lingayen was 60 miles away and gasoline remained in short supply, Gilkenson flew as Webber's gunner to determine whether they could practice at Clark Field. On October 4, they repeated the flight with Webber as gunner. Satisfied, Gilkenson gave the go-ahead, and the squadron began daily gunnery and bombing exercises that culminated in war maneuvers with the cavalry on October 21.

Webber never lost his enthusiasm for manning the rear seat. When he flew as Johnson's observer on September 30, dropping messages to two squadrons of cavalry engaged in an attack and defend exercise, he thought that they speeded up decisive action considerably, noting in his log that as they left for home "both main bodies were trying to ruin each other, and it looked as though they were very likely to succeed."⁴⁹

Webber flew with Johnson again on October 14. In a special demonstration for Brigadier General Charles G. Treat, the commanding officer of Camp Stotsenburg, he dropped four 24-pound fragmentation bombs and two dummy bombs.⁵⁰

On October 18, while still engaged in gunnery and bombing exercises, the squadron, now designated as the 3rd Squadron (Pursuit) but still flying de Havillands, received orders to participate in the 1921 staff rides.⁵¹ Webber greeted the orders with his usual enthusiasm, but he had better news in his pocket: He was returning to Rockwell Field in December.⁵²

On November 15, Webber flew with the Air Service detachment to Paranaque, six miles south of Manila. Despite intermittent rain, he flew missions to Los Banos, 45 miles southeast, where he used a Very pistol, radio (both transmit-



A friendly and self-confident young man, Webber posed in civilian clothing alongside his last automobile in 1922. A Roamer roadster equipped with a Dusenburger motor, it reputedly made a sound "like a 13-gun salute." (Webber Family Collection)

ting and receiving), drop bags, and a camera to obtain and report information about the ground forces maneuvering there.⁵³

It was his last assignment in the Philippine Department. On December 8, 1921, he completed the following tests in preparation for returning to the United States. They provide a summary of the skills expected of an Army aviator in 1921.

Airplane	Work Done	Duration (min)
DH-4	Cross-country	50
DH-4	Landings	30
DH-4B	Puff target	35
DH-4	Front guns (200 rounds)	40
DH-4	Rear guns (200 rounds)	20
DH-4	Bombing (5 rounds)	70
DH-4B	Camera obscura	20
DH-4	Message drop	20
DH-4B	Photography	30
DH-4B	Reconnaissance	30
DH-4B	Panneau	20
DH-4B	Radio test	20

Rockwell Field, Again—On January 18, 1922, Webber sailed through the Golden Gate aboard the transport *Thomas*. With him came Ervin, Hine, Richter and Siefert, who also had completed their foreign service tours. Five DH-4Bs from the 91st Observation Squadron, Crissy Field, Presidio of San Francisco, jazzed the deck in welcome.

By January 24, 1922, Webber was once again flying at Rockwell Field. Fully fledged now, he assumed the duties of

chief test pilot; and he flew many different types of aircraft, including the DH-4B, DH-4B1, DH-4BP1, Fokker C-1, JN-6H, LePere, SE-5, and SE-5A.⁵⁴ Designated Rockwell Air Intermediate Depot (RAID), Rockwell Field did major repairs for Army airfields on the Pacific coast, Hawaii, and the Philippines.⁵⁵ It was Webber's job to test the airplanes after they had been repaired. He also served as assistant engineering officer.

Sometimes Webber turned his engineering skills to more frivolous ends. When Ervin, an avid polo player, found himself short of ponies, Webber manufactured them from wood. Fully equipped with saddles, pneumatic wheels, and handlebars, they brought laughter if not victories on the polo field.⁵⁶

Later in the spring, Webber acquired a new roadster. Someone at Rockwell Field spoofed it in the *Air Service Newsletter*⁵⁷:

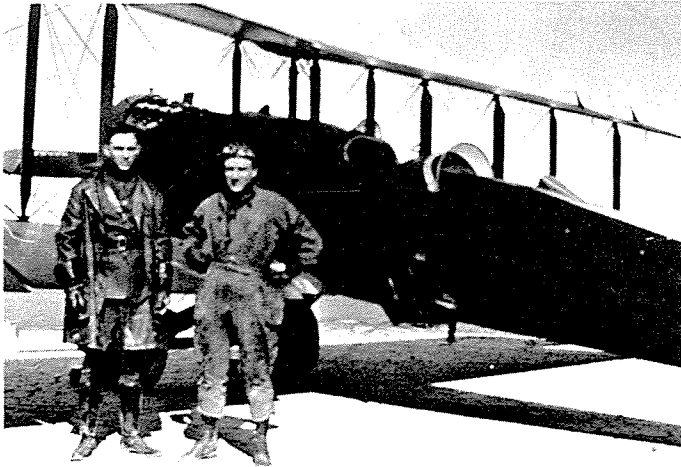
Lieut. Charles Webber, Assistant Engineering Officer, test pilot and bachelor officer, pulled into headquarters last Saturday upon a Roamer roadster, equipped with a Dusenburger motor. He was making a noise like a thirteen gun salute, and all members of the post are anxiously waiting to see the race between Lieut. Webber in his Roamer and Lieut. Burk in his Chevrolet, which is scheduled for the near future. Many are placing their bets on Lieut. Burke, because they feel confident the Circuit Court Judge will have such strings around Lieut. Webber by the time of the race that he will have all gear positions locked, except low.

The results of the race, if it occurred, are unknown.

Webber also gained further experience in cross-country flying. From May 15 through 17, he flew to Phoenix, Arizona, as an observer with Major S.W. Fitzgerald, logging 12 hours and 25 minutes of flight time in five flights. Flying a DH-4B and accompanied by Lieutenant John McCulloch and Lieutenant A.W. Vaneman in another de Havilland, they brought back information about suitable sites for landing fields.⁵⁷

On May 24, Webber and Richter began a flight to Crissy Field that was to take them far off their intended route. Flying a DH-4B and accompanied by Ervin and Captain W.A. Bevan in another de Havilland, they flew to Los Angeles, where they remained overnight. Shortly after noon on the next day, they climbed through heavy fog and headed north toward Bakersfield. Over the Tehachapi Mountains, the de Havillands began to bob like corks in a stream. Both planes crabbed into the wind as Webber and Ervin fought to stay on course. They couldn't do it. *Liberty* Twelves racing, they drifted east by north. Climbing to top dust clouds kicked up by "the worst windstorm that ever swept across the Mojave," they reached an altitude of 18,000 feet. A downdraft caught them, and they plunged 4,000 feet before breaking free. Several hours later they flew over Death Valley. Spying railroad tracks leading northward, they followed them to a large mill. With fuel gauges quivering, they touched down on a nearby lakebed that proved to be Millers, Nevada. They had no sooner staked down their airplanes than they were surrounded by a crowd of excited residents from Tonopah, 12 miles away. Much to their amusement, they learned that they were the first military aviators ever to land there. After spending the night in Tonopah and refueling the next morning, they bowed to popular demand and agreed to a flyover. The

fire chief watched through a powerful field glass and sounded his siren as the de Havillands approached. Webber and Ervin circled twice and waved their wings before going on to Crissy Field, where they landed at 1:15 P.M. By that time, the editor of the *Tonopah Daily Times*, disregarding the winds that had blown the Army aviators off course, was opining that Tonopah, formerly regarded as the home of the tarantula and the sidewinder, was "in line to acquire the aviation habit."⁵⁸



On May 25, 1922, while en route to Crissy Field from Los Angeles, Webber and Richter were blown off course by a massive windstorm and landed on a lakebed at Millers, Nevada. (Webber Family Collection)

Aerial Map Making—From July 26 through August 7, Webber flew almost 4,000 miles mapping air routes in the southwestern states. Flying a de Havilland DH-4B equipped with a Navy compass and a 160-gallon fuel tank that permitted it to remain airborne for eight hours, Webber and Hine visited Las Vegas, Nevada; Salt Lake City, Utah; Denver, Colorado; Muskogee and Fort Sill, Oklahoma; San Antonio and El Paso, Texas; and Nogales, Douglas, and Tombstone, Arizona, before returning to Rockwell Field.⁵⁹ In 10 separate flights, they logged 39 hours in the air, most of them in bad weather.⁶⁰ Following is a summary of their flights:

Date	Flight	Distance	Duration (hrs:min)
July 26	San Diego-Las Vegas	288	3:10
July 27	Las Vegas-Salt Lake City	344	3:09
	Salt Lake City-Denver	600	6:00
July 31	Denver-Muskogee	633	5:50
August 3	Muskogee-Fort Sill	190	1:50
August 4	Fort Sill-San Antonio	460	4:13
August 5	San Antonio-El Paso	520	5:20
August 6	El Paso-Nogales*	200	3:02
August 7	Nogales-San Diego	433	4:32
	Total	3668	36:06

*Flights to Tombstone and Douglas are not included.

Near Fort Collins, Colorado, they flew through a rainstorm so severe that they had to change wheel control every 20 minutes to combat exhaustion. They felt their way into Denver in darkness and landed at Humphries airdrome in a driving rain.⁶¹ Webber's parents, sister and brother waited with an

automobile. A half hour later, Webber and Hine sat down with them for supper. It was Webber's first visit home in four years, and no one suspected that it would be his last.

Four days later, Webber and Hine resumed their flight. Finding better weather farther south, they explored the valley surrounding Tombstone, Arizona, and noted suitable locations for landing fields. They caused concern at Rockwell Field by returning a day late, but the information that they brought back was recognized as an important contribution to the establishment of transcontinental airways.^{62 63}

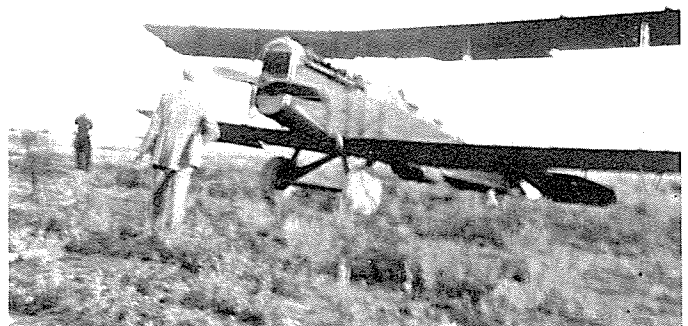
The only sour note that day was the news that Lieutenant James Doolittle had cracked up at Pablo Beach at the start of his intended one-stop flight to San Diego. Some officers thought the War Department would not let him try again.

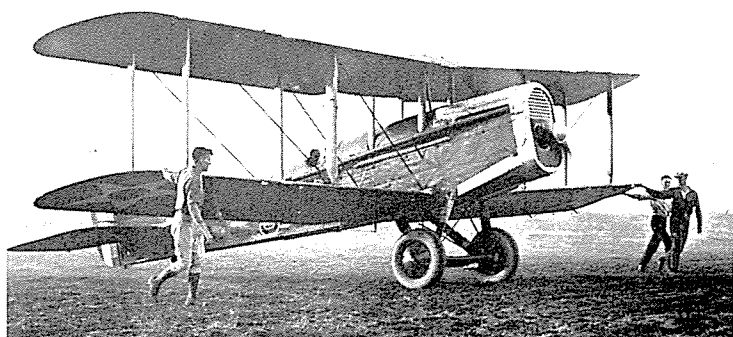
They need not have worried. Doolittle rescheduled the flight for September 5. Knowing that he would be tired at the end of his long journey, he wrote to Lieutenant John McCulloch, the adjutant at Rockwell Field, asking that two pilots meet him over El Centro, California, or Yuma, Arizona, and escort him to San Diego.⁶⁴ No doubt Webber volunteered.

Yuma and Doolittle—On August 31, flying a DH-4B and accompanied by McCulloch in another de Havilland, Webber flew to El Centro to enlist the aid of the Chamber of Commerce in establishing an emergency refueling station.⁶⁵ If Doolittle needed fuel for his final sprint, he would find it waiting.

On September 5, flying a DH-4B and accompanied by Captain William Randolph in another de Havilland, Webber flew to Yuma to meet Doolittle. After circling over El Centro to see that the refueling station was manned and ready, Webber and Randolph cruised eastward. They found Doolittle 15 miles east of Yuma at an altitude of 7,000 feet.⁶⁶ Forming a "V" formation with Doolittle at the point, they roared back over the Imperial Valley and crossed the coastal mountains, the beat of their engines pounding up and down the hillsides like runners' feet. Webber had just missed Doolittle's takeoff for Pablo Beach when he landed at Kelly Field on August 4, and now he enjoyed his first look at the sleek green de Havilland with the dice-and-lucky-seven emblem of the 95th Aero

On July 27, 1922, Webber and Lt. Virgil Hine landed at Denver, Colorado, on a 4,000-mile mapping flight through the Southwest. In this photograph, Merle Webber and others inspect their DH-4B. The field was a few miles north of the present site of Stapleton International Airport. (Merle Webber)





Webber escorted Lt. James Doolittle over the last leg of the transcontinental flight of September 4-5, 1922. He was greatly impressed by Doolittle's specially modified *de Havilland*, which was photographed at Rockwell Field after the flight. (San Diego Historical Society)

Squadron on its sides.⁶⁷ Doolittle had installed a 240-gallon fuel tank and an oversized propeller on his *de Havilland*, and it cruised at 105 miles per hour.⁶⁸ The flight back seemed brief. When they bumped to a stop at Rockwell Field, Webber told reporters⁶⁹:

"I want to tell the world that Doolittle was traveling when we sighted him. . . . He was scooting for San Diego about as fast as any *de Havilland* could travel and he wasn't doing any zigzagging either!"

Doolittle's flight from Pablo Beach, Florida, to San Diego, California, with a single stop at San Antonio, Texas, marked the first time that an airman flew coast to coast in less than 24 hours.⁷⁰ His success was a triumph for the entire Air Service, since it demonstrated the emerging capabilities of the airplane.

The T-2 and the First Nonstop Transcontinental Flight—

Webber was soon assigned to an even more ambitious project. On September 24, Lieutenants Oakley Kelly and John Macready arrived at Rockwell Field in the Fokker T-2 monoplane.⁷¹ The Air Service thought that the T-2, with its 72-foot, high-lift wing and cavernous fuselage bloated with fuel, just might be able to fly coast to coast nonstop, especially if it rode prevailing winds from California to the Atlantic coast. There were problems to be solved, of course. Fully loaded with 725 gallons of fuel, the T-2 weighed a staggering 10,690 pounds, more than twice as much as a *de Havilland*. Thus burdened, and equipped with the same 420-horsepower *Liberty* engine that powered the *de Havilland*, the T-2 could not climb over the coastal mountains. Instead, it had to fly through them by the lowest pass.⁷² That was where Webber came in. He knew the way to Temecula Pass, and he could guide Kelly and Macready.

On October 3, Webber and Richter climbed into the T-2 and flew with Kelly and Macready for three hours to reconnoiter the route.⁷³ Lightly loaded, the T-2 had no trouble negotiating the 1,700-foot pass 50 miles northeast of San Diego.

On October 5, rehearsals completed, Kelly coaxed the fully loaded T-2 into the air.⁷⁵ After two shaky circuits of North

Island, he had gained enough altitude to clear Point Loma. Webber and Richter followed in their *de Havilland*. Mission Bay, Torrey Pines, Hodges Dam, and Escondido slid by beneath them as the two airplanes droned northward. The first sign of trouble appeared over the patchwork fields of Fallbrook, where they found the foothills swathed in clouds. Kelly, still game, bored in. Webber tried to pace him but lost sight of the T-2 in the clouds. Fearing collision, he climbed to 10,000 feet, topped the pass, and landed at Beaumont, where he telegraphed stations on the Southern Pacific Railroad for news of Kelly and Macready. Finding none, he flew on to March Field at Riverside and telegraphed Rockwell Field. To his relief, he learned that Kelly and Macready had returned and were circling to establish an endurance record.⁷⁷ There would be another day.

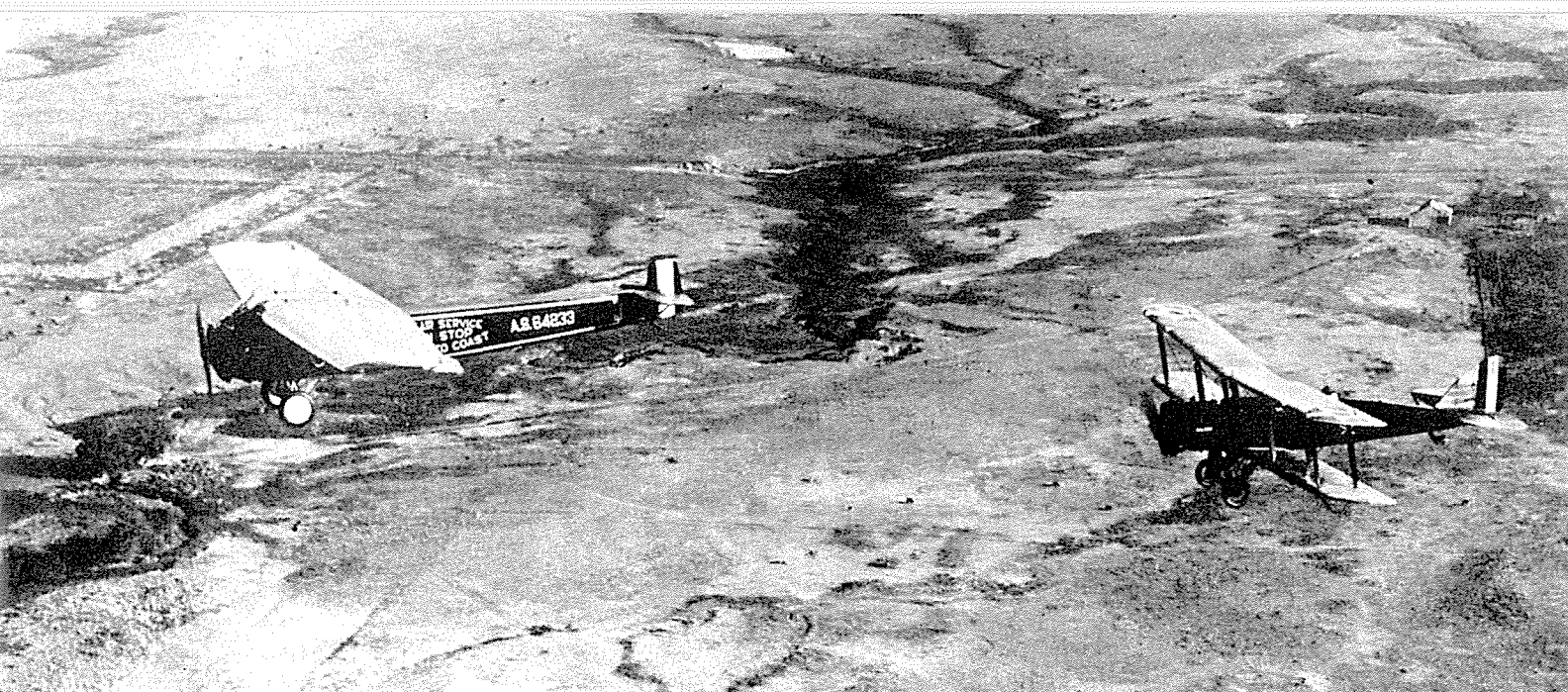
Bad weather delayed the second attempt, but on November 3, Kelly and Macready tried again.⁷⁸ Webber and Richter escorted them to the pass, found it clear, and waltzed them through in high style. They continued through San Geronio Pass, found the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks near Beaumont, and followed them southward, bumping violently in heavy winds. Webber noted in his log: "7:18[A.M.] T-2 crosses east of Hemet north of San Jacinto about one inch to spare."⁸⁰ Over Palm Springs, the *de Havil-*



The *San Diego Union* of December 8, 1922, identified this *de Havilland* as the airplane Webber was flying when he crashed. It is special airplane AS63780, the DH-4B that Webber flew while escorting the Fokker T-2. Its engine forms part of the Airplane Monument. (U.S. Air Force Museum)

land's generator failed, and Webber had to turn off one of the ignition switches. The engine began to work badly, and Webber shifted from one ignition switch to the other to continue the flight. Twenty miles north of Yuma, Arizona, at an altitude of 2,000 feet, Webber and Richter waved goodbye to Kelly and Macready and turned back toward Rockwell Field. They returned in high spirits as they had every reason to think that Kelly and Macready would soon complete the first nonstop transcontinental flight. The next day news came that a cracked cylinder wall in the engine had forced Kelly and Macready down at Schoen Field, Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana. They would not try again from Rockwell Field.⁸¹

Disappearance—Despite his strong supporting role in aviation history, Webber remembered the far horizon of China, and he thought of leaving the Air Service to fly in Asia.⁸² It was not to be.



At 9:15 A.M. on December 7, 1922, after waiting more than an hour for clouds over the Cuyamaca mountains to break, Webber took off from Rockwell Field to ferry Colonel Francis Cutler Marshall to Tucson, Arizona. Marshall was assistant to the Chief of Cavalry in Washington, D.C. Sent to inspect cavalry garrisons around the country, he came to San Diego to inspect Troop F of the 11th Cavalry at Camp Hearn.⁸³ To save time on his inspection tour, he asked Webber's commanding officer, Major Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, to provide an airplane and a pilot to fly him to Tucson, where he was to inspect the ROTC cavalry unit before going on to inspect the 10th Cavalry at Fort Huachuca. Webber volunteered.⁸⁴ Flying the same de Havilland that he and Richter had used to escort Kelly and Macready, he circled the field and disappeared eastward toward Alpine.^{85 86}

The bad weather worried Arnold. As they waited on the runway, Arnold told Webber to return to the field if he could not get through the clouds or to report immediately upon arrival in Tucson if he did. A few minutes after Webber took off, Arnold followed in an SE-5 pursuit plane. Over Chollas Heights, in East San Diego, he turned back without overtaking Webber.⁸⁷

Several hours later, Major Ralph Royce, a veteran aviator who had led the 1st Aero Squadron to France during World War I, landed at Rockwell Field with another airplane from Brooks Field, San Antonio, Texas. Royce told Arnold that he had climbed to an altitude of 10,000 feet without topping the clouds over the mountains east of San Diego.⁸⁸ He and the pilot of the accompanying airplane had descended and scraped through the mountain passes just below the clouds. Another pilot had turned back to El Centro.⁸⁹

When Webber did not report by the following morning, Arnold, mindful of earlier disappearances of Rockwell Field aviators, initiated an aerial search.⁹⁰ Hine, McCulloch, Richter, Randolph, Siefert, and Smith flew the first search missions on the morning of December 8.⁹¹ As days passed and they found no clues, they were joined by pilots from the Naval Air Station, San Diego; the 12th Observation Squadron, Fort Bliss, El Paso; the 91st Observation Squadron, Crissy Field, San Francisco; and the attack groups at Brooks

In the fall of 1922, Webber served as scout pilot for Lts. John Macready and Oakley Kelly during their transcontinental flight attempts from Rockwell Field. This photograph of a DH-4B escorting the Fokker T-2 shows how they might have appeared en route to Temecula Pass.

(National Air and Space Museum)

Field and Kelly Field, San Antonio; until 42 airplanes and almost 100 pilots and observers were searching the deserts and mountains from San Diego to Fort Huachuca, Arizona, and south into Mexico.^{92 93} The 10th Cavalry at Fort Huachuca and the 25th Infantry at Camp Stephen Little, Nogales, sent 450 mounted men to search on the ground.⁹⁴ Despite their best efforts, they found nothing.

On December 18, the officer in charge of the search in Arizona declared it hopeless and returned the airmen to their stations.⁹⁵ Only Richter, with special permission, continued to search from Nogales.⁹⁶

On December 21, the commanding general of the 9th Corps Area, to whom Arnold was responsible, sent an investigator to make a general inquiry into the circumstances of Marshall and Webber's disappearance. He began interviewing

Major Theodore Macaulay, Lt. Virgil Hine, and Lt. John Paul Richter (left to right) searched the Arizona deserts for Webber's missing airplane. Despite their best efforts, they found nothing.

(Webber Family Collection)



pilots and reviewing correspondence related to the search.⁹⁷

Although pilots returning from the search were convinced that Webber was down somewhere in Arizona, Arnold still thought Webber had crashed in the mountains. On December 20, he sent 11 airplanes to search from Banning, in the mountains above Palm Springs, to a point six miles below the Mexican border.⁹⁸ When they returned without information, he sent the 11th Cavalry from Camp Hearn to search the Cuyamacas. On December 28, the officer in charge reported that witnesses at Viejas, Descanso, Guatay, and Morena Dam had probably seen Webber's airplane. Using a road map, he traced a sequence of sightings that suggested Webber had flown southeastward toward Campo.⁹⁹

On January 6, 1923, the 9th Corps Area inspector reported his findings:

- Marshall did not violate regulations in requesting the flight.
- Arnold did not violate regulations in authorizing it.
- The airplane was suitably equipped and serviced.
- Webber was competent to make the flight.

Citing the number of searching airplanes that had flown without mishap over Webber's probable route, the inspector concluded that Arnold could not have considered the flight sufficiently dangerous in advance as to warrant charges of criminal negligence. He recommended that no disciplinary action be taken unless new evidence was discovered.¹⁰⁰

On January 15, 1923, in a final effort to solve the mystery, Arnold sent an automobile party to search along Webber's probable course.¹⁰¹ Hine and Richter were among them.¹⁰² On January 16, the officer in charge reported by telegraph that several persons at Campo had heard Webber's airplane fly over eastward and that ranchers at Campo and at Seely had seen it. He said this information was "absolutely reliable."¹⁰³

On January 16, 1923, a board of inquiry convened at Rockwell Field. In response to the board's questions, Arnold characterized Webber as a particularly active man who kept himself in good condition by his regular habits. Citing Webber's role in the T-2 flights and his experience in cross-country flying in the Southwest, Arnold said that he had not hesitated to accept when Webber volunteered to ferry Marshall.¹⁰⁴

Arnold described Webber's airplane as AS63780, a Dayton-Wright DH-4 remodeled by Boeing to the DH-4B configuration. He said that it had two gasoline tanks providing a total capacity of 150 gallons, two batteries, a compass in each cockpit, and "was completely equipped with all instruments necessary and required for cross-country flight."^{105 106} It was overhauled at Rockwell Field on March 16, 1921, and again on July 20, 1922. It was returned to the aero repair shop for minor repairs on October 21, 1922. As of December 7, 1922, it had flown a total of 169 hours and 55 minutes since arriving at Rockwell Field and a total of 83 hours and 30 minutes since receiving its last overhaul. It appeared to be in first-class condition when examined just before takeoff.¹⁰⁷

When asked his opinion of what had happened to Marshall and Webber, Arnold, drawing upon the 11th Cavalry's report and the telegrams recently received from the automobile searching party, said that he thought Webber had encountered clouds at Alpine, turned southeast at Descanso, and found a hole in the clouds over Campo. He theorized that Webber had continued over the Imperial Valley and made a

forced landing somewhere in Arizona. The gasoline tank had burst and the resulting fire had killed Marshall and Webber."¹⁰⁸

Finally, even Arnold was persuaded that Webber had crashed in Arizona.

On February 9, 1923, the Adjutant General, acting in response to the board of inquiry's finding that Marshall and Webber had "met their death, on or about December 7, 1922, somewhere between Rockwell Field and Fort Huachuca, Arizona," dropped Marshall and Webber's names from the rolls of the Army.¹⁰⁹

On February 23, 1923, the automobile searching party returned to Rockwell Field. The officer in charge, citing the reports of several ranchers who said that they saw an airplane on December 7, reported that there was very little doubt Webber had reached southern Arizona. He concluded that engine failure had forced Webber down somewhere between the Mohawk Mountains and the Growler Mountains. After describing the difficulty of searching sandy washes covered by creosote, palo verde, and mesquite, he hinted that Marshall and Webber might never be found.¹¹⁰

Richter wrote privately to Webber's father that despite official opinion he had no confidence in the reports of an airplane seen in southern Arizona on the day of Webber's disappearance. Perhaps he said as much to Arnold.¹¹¹ On his own initiative, he continued to search for clues in the San Diego mountains.

Arnold resolved to wait until someone, perhaps a prospector or a rancher, found the wreckage. There was nothing more that he could do.

On May 10, 1923, Arnold went to the Cuyamacas to fish. Camped on the Sweetwater River, he slept; and as he slept, he dreamed. In his dream, he sat in his office at Rockwell Field. Marshall and Webber opened the door and stood before him. "Where have you been?" Arnold asked. "We landed on the coast of lower California and we couldn't get off. A sailing vessel came along, but it had no radio. It took us to Australia and we just got back."

The dream was so vivid that Arnold described it at breakfast the next morning.¹¹²

Discovery—On May 12, 1923, a cattleman found the wreckage of Webber's airplane hidden in a pocket of brush on Japacha Peak.¹¹³ Arnold had maintained that Webber was too good a pilot to stray far off course, and he was right.¹¹⁴ The wreckage lay within a few miles of the usual route and within a mile of the campsite where Arnold had his dream.¹¹⁵ Knowing its position, Siefert flew to Japacha Peak and circled, but he was unable to see the wreckage even when he was directly above it.¹¹⁶

The following day, Arnold, Hine, Richter, and others climbed to the wreckage. They found Marshall's West Point ring and eyeglasses and Webber's cap, watch, pistol, and bolo. They identified the airplane by its engine number.¹¹⁷ One hundred yards up the slope, beneath two trees whose tops were broken, lay the de Havilland's rudder and one of its elevators.¹¹⁸ Webber had tried to fly under the clouds, struck the trees, and crashed. He and Marshall were killed on impact.¹¹⁹ The wreckage burned when the fuel tank burst.¹²⁰

Corrected by hindsight, the 11th Cavalry's report told the



Hidden by trees and snow, the wreckage of Webber's *de Havilland* lay undiscovered for five months in the Cuyamaca mountains.
(National Air and Space Museum)

rest of the story.¹²¹

- At 9:45 A.M. on December 7, 1922, a forest ranger at Viejas saw an airplane flying low toward the east.

- At 9:50 A.M., the district ranger, formerly an employee at March Field and able to distinguish the different types of airplanes, saw a *de Havilland* flying low toward the east over the Descanso Ranger Station.

- At 10:00 A.M., the owners of the Descanso store heard an airplane pass eastward over their store. They could not see it because of the fog.

- At 10:00 A.M., a rancher at the north end of Horse Thief Canyon saw an airplane circling as if the pilot were trying to get his bearings. The fog prevented him from seeing which way the airplane went.

- At 10:00 A.M., a rancher at Guatay saw an airplane flying low toward Guatay Peak. The pilot turned suddenly to the north to avoid hitting the peak.

No one saw the last minutes of the flight. Webber probably began climbing soon after turning northward, since the heavily loaded *de Havilland* gained almost 900 feet of altitude during the three minutes required to fly from Guatay (elevation 3,900 feet) to the crash site (elevation 4,770 feet).¹²² Perhaps Webber was trying to return to Rockwell Field, as Arnold had instructed him to do. When he saw the shoulder of Japacha Peak rise before him, he pulled the *de Havilland*'s nose up. The control surfaces on the *de Havilland*'s tail struck the trees and were destroyed. Unable to control the airplane and aware that it was about to crash, Webber may have turned off the ignition switches and the

fuel selector valve.¹²³ The *de Havilland* dove to earth on the eastern face of what is now called Airplane Ridge, there to remain for five months before being discovered. Webber probably crashed a few minutes after 10:00 A.M.

The Airplane Monument—On Sunday, May 23, 1923, 70 civilian employees from Rockwell Field climbed to the crash site and erected the monument. Led by Prentice Vernon Reel, supervisor of the aero repair shop at Rockwell Field, they mixed concrete and attached the bronze plaque, which Reel had cast in the machine shop at Rockwell Field. Finally, they held a brief memorial service.¹²⁴

A few days later, Arnold, Hine, Reel, Richter, Siefert, and Smith returned to the crash site. Carefully removing one of the stones at the base of the monument, they inserted a three-foot metal tube in which they had sealed a list of the officers and civilians at Rockwell Field, three copies of the *San Diego Union* that described the search, and a copy of the 1923 calendar of the Coronado Masonic Lodge. They replaced the stone and left no trace.¹²⁵

Arnold sent photographs of the monument to Webber's father. In the accompanying letter, he wrote¹²⁶:

"This monument lies high in the mountains in a lonely spot, difficult to reach, and will probably be seldom visited on account of these difficulties, but I am sure you and Mrs. Webber desire the possession of this photograph not only as a memento of the place of Lieut. Webber's death, but as a reminder that everything we could think possible to do was done to preserve his memory to the present and coming generation, and that affectionate care and thought guided in the little that we were able to accomplish."

On June 15, 1923, Sherwood Webber replied¹²⁷:



The plaque affixed to the base of the Airplane Monument was cast by Prentice Vernon Reel, superintendent of the aero repair shop at Rockwell Field. (Author's Photo)

Mr. Prentice Vernon Reel, superintendent of the aero repair shop, displayed the plaque before attaching it to the monument. (Frank Curry)



"We were very much pleased to receive your very thoughtful letter concerning the erection of the monument at the place where our son and Colonel Marshall fell. . . . I hope that someday I may see you and thank you personally for your faithfulness and persistence in the search for our boy, who was dearer to us than words can tell. . . . Remember us kindly to Lts. Richter and Hine."

Arnold's prediction that the monument would be seldom visited proved accurate for a time. During the next 12 years, the monument was found only twice.¹²⁸ However, the owners of the land on which the monument was erected granted a deed to a small plot surrounding it "so that it may forever stand as a monument to two brave men who gave their lives in the service of their country."¹²⁹ In 1933, they sold all of their land to the state of California at generous terms to create Cuyamaca Rancho State Park. In February 1934, Charles Carter, a civil engineer who was surveying the boundaries of the park, found the monument again. Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) workers built the Monument Trail, and the monument, situated amidst pines overlooking Japacha Canyon, became a favorite attraction for hikers.¹³⁰

In 1968, park rangers repairing the base of the monument found the tube that Arnold and the others had secreted there. Puzzled, they looked for the officers named on the list. Only Siefert remained alive to tell the tale¹³¹:

"We just wanted a permanent record of the officers who had participated in the search, so we put the tube at the foot of the monument as a sentimental memorial to the two men."

For the Record—It is risky to judge a man by the company he keeps, but in Webber's case there are grounds for doing so. He died five weeks before his 27th birthday and far too early to make his full contribution to aviation. During the five years that he served, he logged a record "of which any young officer of the Air Service might well be proud."¹³² Following is a summary of his flying log that shows the approximate hours of flight time that he logged in the various types of airplanes that he flew:

Manufacturer	Designation	Totals (hrs)
Curtiss	JN-4	27
	JN-6H	141
Burgess	N-9H	47
	de Havilland ¹³³	
	DH-4	215
	DH-4B	152
Fokker	C-1	1
	T-2	3
Lockheed	HS-2L	5
Packard-LePere	Lusac	2
Royal Aircraft Factory	SE-5	19
	SE-5A	2
S.P.A.D.	S-7	1
Total flight time		615

The additional accomplishments that he might have recorded can be glimpsed in the achievements of his fellow pilots. On August 27–28, 1923, Hine, Richter, Siefert, and Smith used the pipeline air-to-air refueling technique, which



On May 23, 1923, 70 civilian employees from Rockwell Field climbed to the crash site.
(Frank Curry)



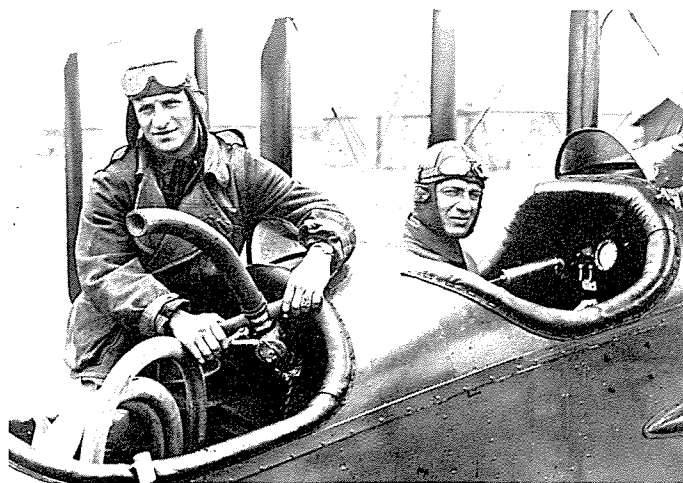
After completing the monument, the men held a brief memorial service.
(Frank Curry)



After policing the area, the Rockwell Field men mixed concrete for the monument.
(Frank Curry)

The Airplane Monument stands on Airplane Ridge, an appendage of Japacha Peak in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park.
(Author's Photo)





Lieutenants Frank Seifert (left) and Virgil Hine (right) flew the tanker plane during the 1923 air-to-air refueling flights. Hine accompanied Webber on his 4,000-mile mapping flight in the summer of 1922. Both Seifert and Hine participated in the aerial search for Webber's airplane, and Hine participated in the automobile search. (National Air and Space Museum)

they had pioneered over Rockwell Field during the previous June, to establish an aerial endurance record of more than 37 hours.¹³⁴ On October 25, 1923, they used the same technique to permit Smith and Richter to fly a de Havilland nonstop from Canada to Mexico, covering a distance of 1,250 miles in 12 hours and 13 minutes and breaking five records for speed, endurance, and distance.¹³⁵ In 1924, Smith brought home the first successful round-the-world flight.¹³⁶ Arnold, by accomplishments too many to enumerate, rose to command the Army Air Forces in World War II. These men respected Webber and mourned his loss. That is the meaning of the Airplane Monument, and it is a measure of the man.

The Service Knows and Will Remember—John Paul Richter escorted his friend's body to Denver. At the funeral, he said that pilots who examined the wreckage found that in the last seconds of the flight Webber had done everything possible to save his airplane and passenger.¹³⁷ Paying tribute to Webber's steadfastness, he presented a floral spray bearing the Air Service insignia and said:

"The Service knows and will remember."

Thanks to the Airplane Monument, others also will remember. ■

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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3. Merle Webber, telephone interview with the author, February 10, 1987.
4. *Denver Post*, May 20, 1923.
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6. Flying log of Charles Leland Webber. Copy in author's possession. All of the dates of Webber's military service are taken from this log.
7. Webber studied the 12-week curriculum of April 1, 1918. The school required cadets to serve an additional week in the Guard Squadron, which saw to the security of the Aeronautical Sciences Building.
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16. Hutchinson, "History of Kelly Air Force Base, Texas," *SAAMA Historian*, January 1962. U.S. Air Force Museum, Dayton, Ohio.
17. Lowell Thomas and Edward Jablonski, *Doolittle: A Biography*, Doubleday and Company, Garden City, New York, 1976, p. 39.
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23. *Air Service Newsletter* (ASNL), August 5, 1920, p. 12.
24. Jack Lincke, *Jenny Was No Lady*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 1970.
25. ASNL, June 2, 1920, p. 8.
26. ASNL, September 17, 1920, p. 15.
27. ASNL, August 5, 1920, p. 11.
28. ASNL, August 27, 1920, p. 14.
29. ASNL, October 8, 1920, p. 17.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
31. *Army Register*, p. 1144.
32. ASNL, December 29, 1920, p. 13.
33. ASNL, December 16, 1920, p. 13.
34. ASNL, February 23, 1921, pp. 5-6.
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36. ASNL, April 1, 1921, p. 19.
37. ASNL, May 6, 1921, p. 11.
38. ASNL, June 10, 1921, p. 13.
39. ASNL, July 22, 1921, pp. 4-5.
40. ASNL, November 1, 1921, p. 10.
41. ASNL, August 4, 1921, p. 8.
42. ASNL, August 19, 1921, p. 14.
43. ASNL, September 16, 1921, p. 5.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
45. *Ibid.*
46. ASNL, November 1, 1921, p. 14.
47. ASNL, November 18, 1921, p. 17.
48. ASNL, November 25, 1921, p. 16.
49. ASNL, December 2, 1921, p. 10.
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57. ASNL, June 30, 1922, p. 16.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 8.
59. The airplane's compass and fuel capacity are mentioned on p. 22 of the *Salt Lake City Tribune*, July 28, 1922.
60. Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce of America, Inc. *Aircraft Year Book*, 1923, p. 380.
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67. *San Antonio Light*, August 4, 1922.
 68. Boyne, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
 69. *San Diego Union*, September 6, 1922.
 70. Lowell Thomas, *op. cit.*, pp. 65, 66. Doolittle flew 2,163 miles in an elapsed time of 22 hours, 30 minutes.
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 73. Louis S. Casey, *The First Nonstop Coast-to-Coast Flight and the Historic T-2 Airplane*, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1964, p. 9.
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 75. Arnold, *op. cit.*, pp. 103, 104.
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 77. *San Diego Union*, October 5, 1922.
 78. Arnold, *op. cit.*, pp. 105, 106.
 79. Casey, *op. cit.*, pp. 12, 13, 88, 89.
 80. Casey, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
 81. Casey, *op. cit.*, p. 14. On May 2, 1923, Kelly and Macready tried again from Roosevelt Field, Long Island, New York. They landed at Rockwell Field on May 3, having flown nonstop across the continent in 26 hours and 51 minutes. The experience gained in the flights of October 5-6 and November 3-4, 1922, had paid its dividends.
 82. Merle Webber, telephone interview with the author, February 10, 1987.
 83. Francis Cutler Marshall (USMA 1890) deserves more than passing mention. He served in the Second Sioux War, the Spanish American War, the Boxer Rebellion, and World War I. As a Brigadier General of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), he won the Distinguished Service Medal and the Croix de Guerre. He served in the occupation of Germany in 1918-1919 and reverted to his permanent rank in 1920. The *Union* of December 8, 1922, describes his visit to San Diego.
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 87. Ervin, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
 88. Adjutant General of the Army, *Directive to the Commanding General, Ninth Corps Area*, January 3, 1923. Major General Edwin Lewis, Commanding General, Eighth Corps Area, included Royce's remarks in his report to the AG, who attached Lewis's report to his directive. National Archives.
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 92. Colonel E.L. Phillips, *Investigation Concerning the Disappearance of Colonel F.C. Marshall, Cavalry*, p. 5. National Archives.
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 103. Arnold, *ibid.*, p. 8.
 104. Ervin, *op. cit.*, pp. 9, 10.
 105. Ervin, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
 106. According to Pamphlet No. 8, published by the War Department Air Service in 1919, instruments required for cross-country flying were: compass, airspeed indicator, altimeter, clock, and drift indicator. See "Aviation Instruments: A Brief History—Part 1," by Robert J. Scheppeler, in the *AAHS Journal*, Volume 6, Number 3, Fall 1961.
 107. Ervin, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
 108. Ervin, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
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 111. John Paul Richter, letter to Sherwood Webber dated March 5, 1923. Copy in author's possession.
 112. Arnold, *Global Mission*, p. 109.
 113. *San Diego Union*, May 14, 1923. Japacha Peak is sometimes identified as South Cuyamaca Peak.
 114. Ervin, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
 115. Arnold, *Global Mission*, p. 109.
 116. *San Diego Union*, May 14, 1923, p. 3.
 117. United States Veterans Administration, *Pension File WC 1539-955 (Francis Cutler Marshall XC-630-523)*, Regional Office, San Diego, Calif.
 118. *San Diego Union*, May 14, 1923, p. 3.
 119. Veterans Administration, *op. cit.* Captain Lewis M. Field, Medical Corps, examined the men's remains. His report leaves no doubt that both men were killed on impact.
 120. *San Diego Union*, May 14, 1923, p. 3. Only the bottoms of the trees surrounding the crash site were burned.

121. Heron, *op. cit.*
 122. United States Department of the Interior Geological Survey, *Cuyamaca Peak Quadrangle*, Map N3245-W11630/15, 1960. California Room, San Diego Public Library.
 123. See Richter's eulogy (reference 137).
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 125. *San Diego Union*, March 17, 1968.
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 128. Richard A. Bloomquist, *A History of Cuyamaca Rancho State Park*, December 20, 1966. Cuyamaca Rancho State Park Headquarters.
 129. Arnold, letter to Sherwood Webber dated May 22, 1923.
 130. Bloomquist, *op. cit.*
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 132. Arnold, letter to Sherwood Webber dated July 18, 1923.
 133. Webber flew American-made DH-4s and DH-4Bs. A total of 4,846 DH-4s were manufactured in the United States from 1918 to 1919 by the Dayton-Wright Company of Dayton, Ohio (3,106); the Fisher Body Division at Cleveland, Ohio (1,600); and the Standard Aircraft Corporation of Patterson, New Jersey (140). After the Armistice, at least 10 companies and Army depots participated in a program to convert more than 1,500 DH-4s to DH-4Bs between 1919 and 1923. The last was withdrawn from service in 1932. See *American Combat Planes*, by Ray Wagner (Third Edition, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1982), p. 17.
 134. Arnold, *History*, p. 115.
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 136. Arnold, *Global Mission*, p. 112.
 137. *Denver Post*, May 20, 1923. The complete quotation follows: "In the hazardous service in which he served, he was a leader, and his sound judgment and conservative flying were demonstrated even in his last great flight, when we found that everything had been done by him the instant before his death to save his passenger and plane. The Service knows and will remember."

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