

Governor's Island Aviation School

By ERWIN J. BULBAN

The Governor's Island, New York, Aviation School was the outgrowth of the Military Training Camps for Business Men which were held at Plattsburg, N. Y. and were generally known as "The Plattsburg Camps." These camps were initially organized by civilians under the direction of Maj. Gen. Leonard Wood, and were commanded by him during the summer months of 1915 and 1916.

Prior to the opening of the first camp in July 1915, some of the men who had been active in its organization made arrangements to take private lessons in flying at Mineola, Long Island, N. Y. including Raynal C. Bolling, James E. Miller, Charles Reed, Frederick T. Blakeman and Philip A. Carroll. Reed, Blakeman and Carroll already had seen something of World War I, having gone to France in November 1914 where they drove ambulances for the American Hospital during the autumn and winter of 1914-15. Like Bolling and Miller, they had been convinced that aviation was destined to play an important role in military operations.

Flying instruction went on during May and June 1915 at Mineola, using an experimental biplane built by Gallaudet, powered by an old 60-hp Gnome rotary. Instructor was "Tex" Millman, considered to be a very able, though young, pilot. A number of flights were made, and when the Plattsburg Camps opened, the Gallaudet was sent to Plattsburg and formed part of the "Motor Machine-Gun Troop" which proceeded by road to the encampment from the 68th Street Armory, New York City as a motor convoy.

This "troop" had been organized in great detail by Bolling. The trucks and motorcycles were supplied by the manufacturers, and a three-inch field piece by the Army or Guard. Cadillac supplied an armored car. Although primitive in the extreme, this unit may be considered as one of the earliest prototypes of the modern motorized division!

Some flying was done at Plattsburg in connection with camp maneuvers, but effective aviation instruction turned out to be impossible. Not only was there no aviation equipment, but the lack of any kind of military equipment was unbelievable. The situation was probably best highlighted by comedian Will Rogers, who at the time included this gag in his regular stage routine: "Seems like the boys at Plattsburg ruined the Army's machine gun by getting sand in it. Too bad, I guess the Army will have to get another one!"

In the spring of 1916, Alexander Cochrane of New York offered to donate \$30,000 to equip a school to train flying personnel of one squadron; Harry Payne Whitney also contributed \$6,500 to this enterprise. Philip A. Carroll, who was known to General Wood in connection with the organization of the 1915 Plattsburg Camp, agreed to organize a flying school, provided it could be conducted on Army property and under military control. This plan was put to Gen. Wood, who had been pleased with the results of the Plattsburg Camp, and who heartily approved it and advised the Adjutant-General of the project on April 5.

The hangar and parade ground at Governor's Island was made available, and some tents and equipment for the personnel. A preliminary memo from the Chief Signal Officer, dated April 19, 1916 shows the plan for the school.

There was some doubt at first whether the field at Governor's Island was suitable and a number of test flights were made during latter April and early May 1916. May 10, Carroll reported to General Wood that conditions were satisfactory and regular flight training started.

On June 8 further regulations were issued by General Wood, fixing the hours of flying from 5:30 to 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. to dark and ordering that, "No fancy or sensational flying will be attempted."

Instruction and practice flying went on constantly during the summer and autumn of 1916 and during early 1917. The school then moved to Mineola in April 1917 and was consolidated with the activities there. A summary of results of the work accomplished at Governor's Island is contained in a report from Philip A. Carroll to Capt. Joseph E. Carberry, dated March 2, 1917.

On May 3, 1917 under the provisions of the National Defense Act, the First Reserve Aero Squadron was formed. Its officers were Major Bolling, Captains Carroll and Miller and 1st Lts. Noyes, Blakeman, Reed, Baker and Post.

Under Bolling's direction, a part of the squadron proceeded to Mineola with Capt. Carroll and the remainder stayed in New York and recruited personnel. The squadron was then encamped at Mineola where it continued its training.

Early in June, Major Bolling, with Miller, Noyes, Baker, Blakeman, Post and Quentin Roosevelt proceeded to Europe, leaving the squadron in command of Capt. Carroll,



The rear face of the Early Birds' Governor's Island Monument, facing Building 100 on the Island. The placard reads: This bronze propeller was cast directly from one of the Wright Brothers' wooden propellers. Two were used to propel the first United States military aeroplane, a 1909 Wright. The original was loaned to the Early Birds by the Smithsonian Institution, National Air Museum--Paul E. Garber, Head Curator.

who conducted its training until August 23, when it sailed on the S.S. Baltic. This ship also carried the 30th and 37th Aero Squadrons from Kelly Field, Texas under the command of Major Carl Spaatz. Arriving at Issoudun, the squadron's designation was changed to 26th Aero Squadron and its equipment and personnel formed the basis for the start of that great school.

On December 17, 1954 ceremonies commemorating Governor's Island's place in aviation history were held at the site. A striking stone monument, bearing plaques and including a bronze casting of one of the propellers from a 1909 Wright purchased by the U.S. Government as the first U.S. military plane, was dedicated. The then president of the Early Birds, Clarence A. deGiers, delivered an address recounting the historical background leading to the placement of the monument by the Early Birds.

The plaque lists the names of pioneers who flew powered aircraft to and from Governor's Island between 1909 and 1916 and listed those who, from March 1916 to March 1917, comprised the membership of the Governor's Island Training Corps Flight. The names listed for this latter group include: Capt. Philip A. Carroll, commanding; Charles Reed, J. Walter Struthers, William A. Larned, Frederick T. Blakeman, Stedman S. Hanks, Cord Meyer, Charles D. Wiman, James E. Miller, Seth Low, Lawrence Sperry, Hobart A. H. Baker, Al Sturtevant, Edwin M. Post, Jr., William Walton, Albert B. Gaines, Jr., Howard G. Lapsley and John M. L. Rutherford. Listed as instructor is Filip A. Bjorklund.

ADDENDA: To obtain more complete information on the WW I airmen connected with the history of the First Reserve Aero Squadron, we asked Mr. J. J. Smith, Researcher, WW I Air Service Personnel, to compile reports on as many of these men as possible. This he has done, and his reports follow. (The report on Filip A. Bjorklund was prepared by Mr. Paul R. Matt.)

BAKER, HOBART A. H. Capt. A.S. Assigned to 94th Sqdn. Mar 7 to Apr 2, 1918. Transf to 103rd Sqdn, Apr 3 to July 13, 1918. Transf to 13th Sqdn, July 14 to Aug 10, 1918. Transf to 141st Sqdn as C.O. to Dec 20, 1918. Killed in crash on Toul Field.

BJORKLUND, FILIP A. Born in Sweden, went to England to take up flying. Soloed Dec 29, 1913 near London in a 50 hp Farman typepusher airplane. Received British FAI 732. Was a freelance instructor and test pilot. Came to America, doing most of his flying around the Mineola area. Was instructor and test pilot on the first Gallaudet aircraft, later went to Governor's Island as an instructor on the Gallaudet used by the encampment. It was Filip who taught Bolling to fly. Continued instruction at Mineola on Gallaudets for the New York National Guard. Later joined Vincent Burnelli to test his first aircraft. In 1918 he went to Chanute Field, Illinois as instructor for the Signal Corps. Never listed as a member of the military forces.

BLAKEMAN, FREDERICK T. Major, A.S. Instructor at Mineola and at Clermont-Ferrand, France, 1918.

BOLLING, RAYNALL C. Col. U.S.A.S. Assigned to British Royal Flying Corps to obtain procedure for organizing, training and deploying squadrons which involved contact with "Front Line" squadrons. There he found five U.S. Sqdns being trained by British at the front. Corp. Paul L. Holder, 22nd U.S. Sqdn was assigned as his chauffeur. He then made his report to Hdqtrs at Paris. They returned to the front at night, unaware that the German Infantry had advanced into France, they were halted by a patrol. Col. Bolling was killed by a rifle bullet, Holder became a POW (the only enlisted airman POW) on March 29, 1918. Bolling's body was never found, the terrain demolished by shell holes, Bolling Field, Washington, D.C. is named for him.

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CARBERRY, JOSEPH E. Col. A.S. B. Wisc. July 20, 1887, B.S. Degree U.S. Mil. Acad. 1910. Assigned to Aeronautics Div. U.S. Signal Corps. Instructor at North Island, San Diego 1914, Exped. Forces to Mexico 1916, C.O. of Taliaferro Field and Rich Field 1917-18. Had enviable record in outstanding achievements in Aviation. Died Nov. 13, 1961 Arcadia, Calif.

CARROLL, PHILIP ACOSTA Col. A.S. Founder Member of the First Reserve Aero Sqdn, learned to fly 1915. Member Aero Club of America. Member Bolling Commission in Europe, also on staff of U.S.A.S. in France. Died NYC 1957.

GAINES, ALBERT B. JR. No record of military service available.

HANKS, STEDMAN SHUMWAY Major A.S. Born Manchester, Mass. 1889, Harvard 1912. Learned to fly Gov's Island 1916, Aide to Chf of Sig. Corps 1917, also Liaison Officer British, French and Italian missions, C.O. of 18th Aero Sqdn. North Island 1918. Pres. Am. Airports Assn 1927, USAS Plans Div. 1935-40, Air Corps Ferry Command 1941, advisory capacity on airports.

LOW, SETH Capt. A.S. Assigned to 95th Sqdn February 14 to Mar. 15, 1918, transf 94th Sqdn Mar. 16 to Apr 2nd, to 103rd Sqdn Apr 3 to July 29, to 93rd Sqdn July 30 to Aug. 9th, to 185th Sqdn Aug 10, to Nov. 6th, to 1st Air Depot.

MEYER, CORD 1st Lt. A.S. Assigned to 103rd Sqdn Mar. 30, 1918, transf to 93rd Sqdn July 29th. On Aug. 19, 1918 both legs broken in a crash which killed A. Blair Thaw not far from Ourche, France.

MILLER, JAMES ELY Capt. A.S. Assigned to 95th Sqdn Feb 25, 1918, then at Villaneneuve, near Chateau-Thierry as C.O. on March 9th. Asked Majors Johnson and Harmon to let him accompany them on a mission to Rheims. Miller never returned and his fate is unknown.

NOYES, STEPHEN HENLEY Capt. A.S. Assigned to 1st Aero Sqdn June 7, 1918 to Oct. 19th. Transf. to staff of 5th Corps as C. O.

NOYES, DANIEL RAYMOND, Capt. A.S. (Brother of Stephen) Instructor at Tours, France. Crashed Aug. 17, 1918, broken leg among other injuries.

POST, EDWIN MAIN, JR. Capt. A.S. Military record not available.

REED, CHARLES Capt. A.S. Military record not available. Died 1941 New York City.

ROOSEVELT, QUENTIN, 1st Lt. A.S. Assigned to 95th Sqdn June 17, 1918 Coincy, France, flying a combat mission from the airdrome at Saints on July 14, 1918 Lt. Roosevelt failed to return. Several days later a note from a German plane stated he had been killed in combat and was buried near Chambry, Marne by them with Military Honors. A monument marks his grave.

RUTHERFURD, JOHN M. L. 1st Lt. A.S. Assigned as an instructor in France at U. S. Training Bases.

SPERRY, LAWRENCE B. USN, RF, Pilot #345. Military record not available. Invented gyroscope equipment.

STRUTHERS, J. WALTER 1st Lt. A.S. Record unavailable.

STURTEVANT, ALBERT D. USN, RF, Pilot #77. First U. S. Naval aviator killed in WW I in combat over the North Sea, Feb. 15, 1918. Decorated posthumously.

WALTON, WILLIAM P. 1st Lt. A.S. Military record not available.