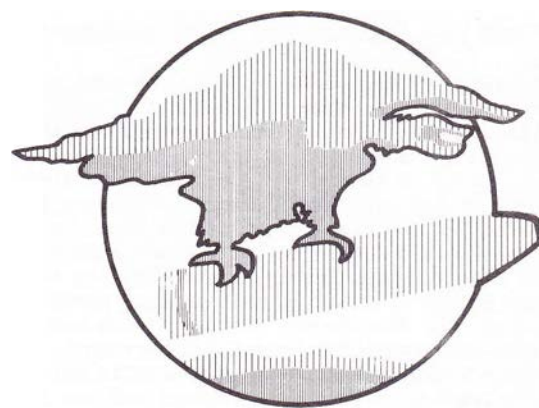


The 12th Aero Squadron Observation (A.R.2&-Salmons)

By James Sloan



PART 1

In terms of World War I service, the 12th Aero Squadron had an extensive history, being one of the first U. S. squadrons to be organized and placed in operation. Its training started in the U. S. in June; it proceeded overseas in December. After further instruction at the First Corps Observation School it was assigned the quiet Toul sector and was thereafter in nearly continuous operation through all of the major Allied offensives until the Armistice, giving a steady effort in the dangerous and grueling work of infantry contact patrol and observation.

After the War was over and the Air Service began to examine its accomplishments and its mission for the future, the lessons obtained by the 1st Corps Observation Group, and particularly the 12th Aero Squadron, became the subject of much study. In June 1920 the Air Service published its Information Circular No. 75 (TACTICAL HISTORY OF CORPS OBSERVATION, AIR SERVICE--THE FIRST CORPS OBSERVATION GROUP IN THE TOUL SECTOR, April 1918), which was an objective view of the recent operations and their effect on the course of the War. The tactical history of the Squadron is excerpted below from that report.

Three squadrons composed the 1st Corps observation group, which early in April commenced active operations over the front occupied by the 26th Division, United States Army, between Flierey and Apremont on that portion of the front known as the Toul sector. The air-drome was situated at Ourches, about 30 kilometers behind the lines. The 1st, 12th and 88th Aero Squadrons formed the group. The airplanes of the 1st Aero Squadron were of the Spad XI C.L. type. Those of the 12th were of the Dorand A.R. type, two-seater, 190 hp, Renault engine. The 88th flew Sopwith 1.5 Strutters.

The pilots of these three squadrons, with one or two exceptions, had never before operated on the front. The group and squadron commanders were in every case men of long experience in training work but had never flown to an appreciable extent under war conditions. The greater portion of the observers had spent from one to two months on duty as active fliers with French squadrons at the front. These officers brought to their organizations a very considerable and exceedingly valuable practical knowledge of the work about to be undertaken. The enlisted mechanical and special technical personnel was well trained and in most cases proved thoroughly qualified for the work in hand.

No major operations were in course, nor were any foreseen as an immediate contingency. The friendly situation in the air was satisfactory. Two American pursuit squadrons with station at Toul (94th & 95th) were available for the aerial defense of the sector. These were sufficient in view of the inactive aspect of that

portion of the front.

In the air the enemy was weak. Isolated observation airplanes were reported from time to time. No pursuit formations of more than five airplanes were operating, and the presence of pursuit airplanes, even in small numbers, over the sector was rare. The enemy depended for aerial defense very largely upon an unusually strong concentration of mobile antiaircraft artillery.

THE MISSION OF THE 1st CORPS GROUP

The mission of the 1st Corps Observation Group was primarily to keep the friendly command informed of the general situation within the enemy lines by means of visual and photographic reconnaissances. It was called upon to effect, whenever necessary, the adjustment of our own artillery fire. It was required to be in readiness to accomplish contact patrols with our troops in case of attack, to furnish the means of training our ground troops in the use of the aerial arm, e.g., to take part in terrain exercises with the troops of the 26th Division, and to conduct panel exercises with the divisional artillery by means of radio. It was not expected at this time that the work of the 1st Corps Group would produce any important tactical results or render any great assistance to the conduct of operations, but rather, that it complete the schooling of pilots and observers and render them more competent to undertake intensive operations elsewhere on a larger and more complete scale. One squadron, operating at high tension, would have been sufficient for the accomplishment of all missions required by the tactical situation.

Numerous artillery adjustments were successfully carried out by the Group, particularly by the 12th Aero Squadron. The 1st Aero Squadron effected successful photographic missions at frequent intervals. The 88th Aero Squadron, which joined the group late in May, was particularly active in effecting close-range reconnaissances of the enemy sector.

It is noteworthy that the work of the Group was seldom hampered by the presence of enemy pursuit aircraft. Practically no experience in combat was gained. On the other hand, the enemy antiaircraft fire in the sector was exceedingly dense, active and accurate. Pilots of the Group were adept at evading antiaircraft fire after a month on the sector. During the Seichprey action infantry contact patrols were attempted. They were unsuccessful, partly because of the inexperience of the teams but principally because of the incomplete training of the troops, who showed no panels when airplanes called for the staking of the line.

To the Group itself, the period spent on the Toul sector was invaluable. No essential to a liberal flying training was lacking, with the possible exception of

actual combat work against armed pursuit.

THE 12th AERO SQUADRON IN THE BACCARAT SECTOR

During the first week of June, the 12th Aero Squadron received notice that orders would shortly be issued for its movement overland to Vathemenil, in the Baccarat sector, to the southeast of Luneville. Accordingly, an advance party of several officers and a considerable detachment of men were sent forward to prepare the airdrome and buildings for the arrival of the squadron. The fact that the location assigned for the airdrome possessed little else than some newly erected hangars necessitated a great amount of labor by this advance party in the preparation of the landing field, offices and quarters for both enlisted and commissioned personnel. A construction squadron had not been available for this work. The utilization of squadron officers and men in the advance party and, in addition, the necessity for utilizing a large proportion of the squadron in this work after its arrival interfered with active operations for a period of four days.

During its first week in this sector, the squadron gave up its A. R. airplanes and received 18 Salmson Sal. 2A2 airplanes equipped with radial Salmson engine of 260 hp. The Baccarat sector was a typical "stabilized" or "quiet" sector. The enemy was strongly entrenched in positions which had been in existence for many months. Barbed-wire entanglements and machine-gun strong points reinforced the lines of trenches. To the rear he was supported by the usual complement of field and heavy artillery.

In the air his forces were considerably more numerous than was the case in the Toul sector. A rather active observation service was supplemented by a pursuit force which carried out daily patrols of the sector. The latter, although not equipped with the latest types of enemy pursuit airplanes, was active and aggressive. Bombardment squadrons operated on practically all clear nights against various posts of command in the sector, Allied airdromes, and the towns and villages adjoining the lines.

The sector of the 42d Division to which the 12th Squadron was assigned, extended approximately from Badenviller to Blamont, some 12 kil., under the command of the 6th Corps of the 8th French Army. The command of all aviation forces in the Baccarat sector was vested in the "Commandant of the Sector Aeronautique", whose headquarters were located at Luneville. There was no regularly assigned pursuit aviation patrolling that section of the front. As a consequence, the observation airplanes operating there had to rely solely upon their own armament as a means of defense against hostile aircraft.

The mission devolving upon the 12th Aero Squadron in this sector was reconnaissance and surveillance of the enemy by visual and photographic means, adjustment of artillery fire, infantry-contact patrol to locate the position of the front lines, and training with infantry and artillery.

To operate as an individual squadron all that was required was to place in active operation the squadron radio equipment, to install a photographic section, and to assign for duty at the squadron a branch intelligence officer. Under the direction of the squadron commander, the work over the lines was to be distributed by the operations officer and assistant operations officer according to a roster of the flying personnel, exceptions to be made occasionally in cases where certain pilots and observers were particularly well qualified to carry out some special mission. Carefully prepared plans for the defense of the airdrome and, if necessary, the withdrawal of the squadron in case of hostile attack were received from the Commandant of the Sector Aeronautique, 6th Corps, 8th French Army. These plans were given careful study and all necessary steps were taken to carry them into execution in case the need arose.

In the main, the actual operations conducted by the 12th Aero Squadron in the Baccarat sector were a continuation and development of those carried out previously in the Toul sector. In a few instances visual reconnaissance missions were dispatched under orders from the Sector Aeronautique of the 6th French Corps to procure certain specific information in well-defined areas of the enemy positions.

It was learned that a general visual reconnaissance of the sector produced very little in the way of valuable results except when performed at dawn or just before dark; reconnaissance missions performed during the daytime scarcely ever realized success sufficient to justify their dispatch and execution. This fact is easy to comprehend when it is remembered that the sector had long been stabilized and that no active operations were in course. Enemy and friendly activity was almost entirely confined to the hours of darkness.

THE 1st CORPS AIR SERVICE AT CHATEAU-THIERRY

The German offensive which began May 26th on the Aisne and carried the enemy forces as far as the Marne, was virtually arrested by the first week in June. It had resulted in a huge V-shaped salient, the mouth stretching between Soissons and Rheims and the tip resting on the Marne at Chateau-Thierry. During the last week of June, plans were announced for the commencement of operations by the 1st American Army Corps on the western side of the salient, in a sector commencing at the village of Vaux, immediately to the west of Chateau-Thierry and extending approximately as far as Courchamps.

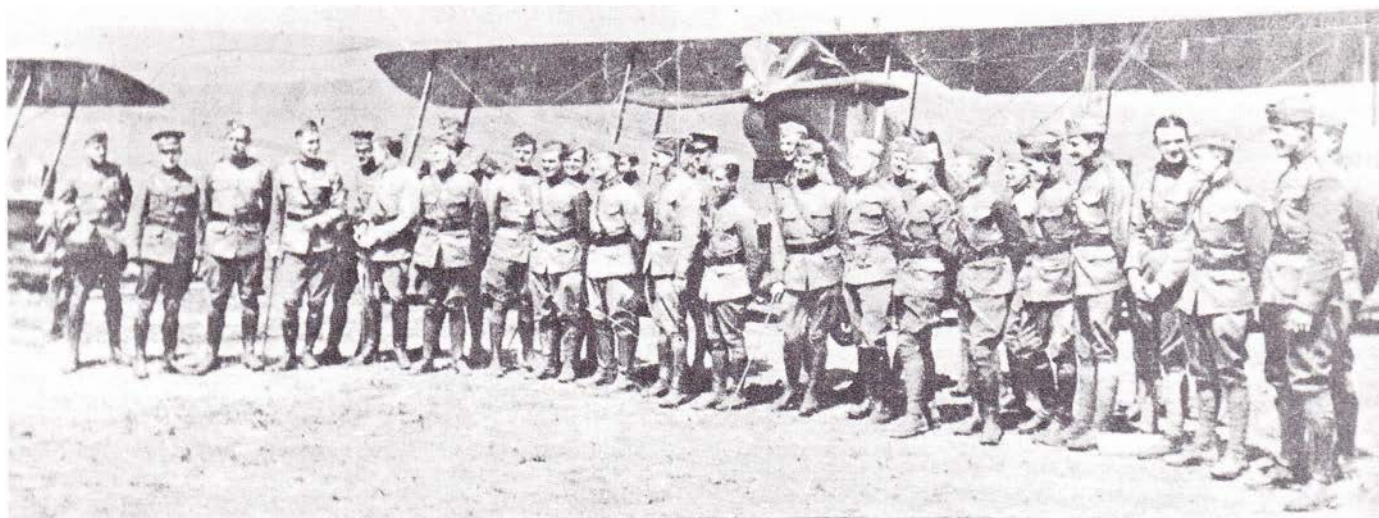
During the operations on this front, there were three phases. The first was marked by preparations of the enemy for a renewed offensive and preparations by the Allies of a defense to meet the impending attack. The second was the period of enemy offensive and successful Allied resistance. The third saw the execution of a determined and successful Allied offensive.

In the first week of July the office of the Chief of Air Service, 1st Army Corps, was established at La Ferte-sous-Jouarre. Here for the first time the Chief of Air Service assumed active tactical control of the units making up the Corps Air Service. These units consisted of the observation squadrons comprising the 1st Corps Group, and the balloon companies operating with the Corps troops. (In the tactical control of the corps balloon companies, the Chief of Air Service was represented at all times by a trained balloon officer, known as the Corps Balloon Wing Commander, who assumed direct charge of all operations conducted by the balloon units. At no time were the detailed operations of the balloon units controlled from the office of the Chief of Air Service. This work was performed by the Corps Balloon Wing Commander and staff, with offices located in proximity to the various balloon companies.)

The duties of the Corps Chief of Air Service (as quoted in a General Order) were, briefly:

"He is the adviser of the corps commander and the Corps General Staff in all that pertains to the Air Service. He will keep the corps commander informed in regard to aeronautical matters and will make such recommendations as he considers necessary regarding aeronautical personnel, material and methods. In accordance with the general plan of operations and in cooperation with G-3 of the corps, he prepares the general plans of action for all the air units of the corps. He insures the coordination of the aeronautical plans of divisions and supervises the employment of all air units throughout the corps in accordance with approved plans. He prepares the detailed plans for the air units under his direct order."

The units under the command of the Corps Chief of Air Service were the 1st and 12th Aero Squadrons and a French squadron, replaced July 6 by the 88th Aero Squadron.



This picture was taken sometime between May 14th and June 8th, 1918 at Ourches and shows most of the members of the Squadron at that time. Left to right are: Houston, Schnur, Miller (K.I.A.), Kennedy, W. D. Baker, Montgomery, Hinds (K.I.C.), West, Collett, Hughes, Saunders, Lockhart, Brereton (C.O.), Bell, Thomas, Gates, Bowman, Bryan, E. M. Morris, Dailey, Lumsden (K.I.A.), Allen, Hall, Foy, Walter, Stewart, Bush, Stuck, Over, Davidson, Luhr and Wade.

(Photograph - Judge Ben Harwood, Billings, Montana)

The relation of the Chief of Air Service to the Army Corps Commander and staff was chiefly advisory. The Air Service being a comparatively new arm of the Service, the Corps Chief of Air Service had to bear in mind that few of those higher in command were acquainted with its actual possibilities and limitations.

The function of the Chief of Air Service was to assign the Air Service units to line units and supervise in detail the work performed. He was to initiate measures for the instruction of the infantry and artillery in the proper employment of and efficient cooperation with the Air Service units.

It was the duty of the Information Officer to keep the Chief of Air Service and Air Service units supplied with the latest tactical and technical information, including maps, photographs, tactical orders, technical and general air service information. He was responsible for the Consolidated Intelligence Report of the Corps Air Service, published nightly.

The Operations Officer was responsible for the proper coordination and execution of all operations of the Corps Air Service units. He prepared and forwarded all orders concerning operations and prepared the daily Corps Air Service Operations Report.

Together with the Information Officer, the Liaison Officer was responsible to insure that the Group secured all maps, photographs and other information from the corps troops necessary for operations. It was his duty to arrange with the Corps Chief Signal Officer for the establishment of telephone and radio liaison between the Chief of Air Service, Observation group, corps staff, and line posts of command, and in general to supervise the establishment of all other necessary forms of liaison between the Corps Air Service and other corps troops. It was his duty to supervise the work of collecting and forwarding the following information to the Chief of Air Service, the group and squadrons: Location of all posts of command, names of commanders, telephone and radio connections therewith, location of panel and "dropped message" stations, radio calls, panel numbers assigned to each post of command, radio, telephone and panel codes and, if artillery, location of guns, number, caliber and fields of fire.

In the last week of June, orders were received for the 1st Corps Observation Group Headquarters and the 1st and 12th Aero Squadrons to proceed from their respective stations to the Marne sector. The movement by motor

truck commenced June 28. By noon of the 29th all the airplanes of both squadrons had been flown overland from the Ourches and Vathemenil airdromes to the new location at Saints, some 5 kil. to the south of Coulommiers. Advance parties from each squadron had arrived by automobile and perfected all arrangements for the billeting of officers and men. By the night of June 29 the main body of both units had arrived and been installed on the airdrome. The French squadron was already installed.

The airdrome was situated on a large level wheat field which had but recently been harvested. The hangars, already erected by French Air Service construction units, were the standard type of large Bessoneaux canvas shelters; all of them were well camouflaged.

The enlisted personnel, for the most part, were billeted in a group of farm buildings which bordered the flying field, the overflow being quartered in squadron tentage. The commissioned personnel were billeted in the near-by villages of Saints and Mauperthuis.

The sector of the front to be covered extended approximately from Chateau-Thierry to Courchamps, a distance of 15 kil. The distance of the front lines from the airdrome varied from 40 to 55 kil. The location of the observation group at such a great distance from the front lines was a tactical necessity, considering the impending enemy offensive in the direction of Paris.

Under orders of the Air Service Commander, 6th French Army, the 1st American Pursuit Group of four squadrons plus several French squadrons which performed the work of night and day reconnaissance operated for the Army. Until the middle of July there were no Allied bombardment squadrons operating in this sector.

At Chateau-Thierry the enemy had a powerful aggregation of pursuit squadrons and many squadrons which carried out the work of observation, army day and night reconnaissance and bombardment. Here, for the first time in the history of the 1st Corps Group, it became a daily occurrence to encounter enemy pursuit patrols in numbers varying from 7 to 20 in a single patrol. These hostile pursuit forces were equipped with the latest types of fast scout airplanes; among them were some of the best of German pursuit aviation.

On June 30, the major portion of the pilots and observers of the 1st and 12th Aero Squadrons carried out flights over the front lines to orient themselves to the new sector. On the afternoon of July 1 occurred the attack by the 2d Division, U.S.A., against the

village of Vaux. At this time airplanes from both squadrons were in the air performing the work of infantry contact. The operations of this and the previous day were conducted as a matter of emergency, before comprehensive plans had been drafted assigning squadrons to specific work with the various corps units.

During the next five days the 1st and 12th Squadrons perfected their interior organization on the airdrome, established their lines of supply, received and placed in good running order a number of new airplanes and, in general, prepared for their work in the new sector. Missions of visual reconnaissance were executed at dawn and twilight daily. Several photographic missions were performed over portions of enemy territory designated by G-2 of the corps staff. A few artillery adjustments were accomplished, but the relief of the 2d Division by the 26th Division, U.S.A., on July 5 prevented the performance of other adjustments which had been arranged.

On the same date the group was ordered to move to the airdrome at Francheville, a small village to the northwest of Coulommiers where it was joined by the 88th Aero Squadron which had proceeded overland from the Ourches airdrome. Operations by the Corps Air Service as a complete organization began on July 7.

A nightly meeting was held in the G-2 section of the Corps General Staff for the purpose of discussing the developments of the day. The Corps Air Service was represented at this meeting by the Chief of Air Service, or a member of his staff, by the Group Intelligence Officer, and as often as possible by the Group and Squadron Commanders. At this time all photographic missions were assigned to the Group by the Corps G-2 section, and instructions were given as to the particular information to be sought by the observers during the next day's visual reconnaissance missions.

Because of the great distance from the airdrome to the front lines, it was thought expedient to establish an advance landing field at Morass farm, a few kilometers east of La Ferte-sous-Jouarre. Two airplanes from each squadron proceeded there soon after daylight on all days when the weather permitted aerial operations. Supplies for the operation of the airplanes were transported by motor truck from the Francheville airdrome. A radio station was established for the purpose of communication with the Group and the corps and divisional posts of command. A direct telephone line connected the field with the office of the Chief of Air Service and the corps switchboard. The duty of the pilots and observers was to hold themselves in readiness.

The unstable state of the sector made it imperative that frequent photographs be secured of the first-line positions and of the enemy territory farther to the rear. As often as the weather permitted, missions of this nature were dispatched from the two squadrons assigned to the work. Great difficulty was experienced in carrying out these missions due to frequent and persistent attacks of hostile pursuit patrols.

Aside from the general impracticability of pursuit protection during attacks by hostile airplanes, great difficulty was encountered in effecting a rendezvous with friendly pursuit forces before proceeding to the lines. The result was a gradual adoption of a policy of sending a number of observation airplanes upon each photographic mission, the leading airplane of the formation being equipped for the photographic work contemplated and the others acting as biplane protection. However, the element of confidence undoubtedly induced by the presence of pursuit protection was not abandoned, and as frequently as possible arrangements were perfected to have them accompany the photographic airplane.

The second phase of the Marne campaign extended from July 15 to 18. During these three days the last enemy offensive was launched, spent its force, and was completely checked by the Allied defense. The duration of the entire enemy offensive was so short that no real developments resulted from the point of view of Corps Air Service tactics.

During the afternoon of July 17 the plans for the 3rd phase, the Allied counteroffensive which was to open July 1st were received. Liaison was effected immediately with all corps and divisional posts of command. The area was divided into zones, each zone to be covered by one group of the corps artillery in the work of neutralizing the artillery of the enemy. Copies of this map were prepared for the use of the squadron observers in the work of surveillance. This plan permitted the location of an enemy battery in action by the observer. He could then signal this information to the corps artillery group concerned, which would immediately take it under fire. Although attempts had been made daily during the course of the preceding two weeks to fix plans for the rapid adjustment of roving batteries against targets signaled from the airplane, no success had been attained. The result was that there was no real provision made to cope with a situation of mobile warfare as occurred in this 3rd phase.

The most serious difficulties encountered in infantry contact patrols were the direct result of the lack of training of the infantry in carrying out their part in response to the signals of the airplane observer. Both the 26th and later the 42d Divisions had been given a certain amount of training in conjunction with the Air Service, but it was insufficient to insure success in determining location of the infantry by means of the infantry airplane. Infantry units were not equipped with the proper supply of individual panels and flares for marking out the lines. After this condition was remedied, the infantry had apparently forgotten their proper use for marking out the line at the call of the observer. In the majority of infantry contact patrols the observer was forced to descend to altitudes varying from 300 to 50 meters, facing galling machine-gun and rifle fire, and locate the front lines of the friendly troops by distinguishing their uniforms.

During the first two weeks of the offensive, the advance was so rapid that it became impossible to take photographs of all the territory in the line of advance and photo missions were limited to procuring photographs of certain areas chosen by G-2. Weather conditions frequently hampered the execution of these missions, but on the whole, valuable results were obtained. At about this time the taking of oblique views at low altitudes, varying from 400 to 800 meters, became customary, for such photographs proved invaluable to the command in the planning of future operations. Until this date, all photography had been vertical.

In the opening days of the offensive, the artillery airplanes met with considerable success in their work of signaling reports on the activity of hostile batteries, in pursuance of the plan made July 17. However, after movement on the part of the corps artillery regiments began, it became increasingly difficult to keep up communication between the Air Service and the front-line troops and finally the plan had to be abandoned.

Under conditions like these, from July 18 until the halt at the Vesle, with the Air Service located from 40 to 80 kil. behind the front of attack, and the artillery of the division changing position daily, artillery correction was obviously a complete failure. The net result was that the Air Service cooperation with the artillery was as an information agent. In only a few instances was the observer successful in securing the fire of a battery on a fugitive target. Attempts made by the observer to locate batteries while in the air by means of repeated wireless calls and a prolonged search for the radio station panel, were usually unavailing.

The custom of detaching a trained observer from a squadron and assigning him to act as Air Service liaison officer at the posts of command of the corps artillery commander was now adopted. Thus the Corps Chief of Air Service sought to ameliorate the general unsatisfactory condition which resulted from the breakdown of all ordinary means of liaison during the advance to the Vesle. It was hoped that by this means the artillery and

infantry could be instructed somewhat in the proper use and limitations of the Air Service.

The great distance to be covered between the line organizations and the Air Service was the cause of a complete breakdown in telephonic communication. After July 19 it was practically impossible to procure a connection between the divisions and the squadrons. It was nearly always possible to send messages by means of telegraph, but pressure of business was such that the service required from two to four hours from Corps Headquarters to the Group and Squadrons. Radio, the form of liaison which is ideal for use in a war of movement, was not yet developed to a point where it could be relied upon.

It therefore became the duty of the Liaison Officer stationed at the posts of command to supply the Chief of Air Service, the Group and the Squadrons, with all information necessary for the conduct of Air Service operations.

Upon the relief of the 26th Division by the 42d Division on July 25th the corps sector was narrowed to a one division front, and the 167th French Division ceased operations under the 1st Army Corps. On July 22, the 1st and 12th Aero Squadrons were moved from the airdrome at Francheville to that at Morass farm.

Because of the large number of enemy pursuit squadrons operating in this sector there were numerous losses in carrying out the work of corps observation. The replacement of pilots and observers was slow, and great difficulty was experienced in procuring replacements in airplanes. It was not infrequent that a flying personnel of from six to eight pilots and observers in each squadron executed the missions scheduled for the day. This necessitated the execution of two or three missions per team per day.

On August 2 the Group moved to the airdrome at Mayen-Multien (just north of the Meaux); on August 10 it was again moved, this time to Coincy, to the southwest of Fere-en-Tardenois; and on August 12 the 1st Corps Air Service was relieved from duty in the sector and was sent to Chailly-en-Brie to await orders to proceed to another sector.

The Marne campaign demonstrated beyond doubt the necessity of developing to the highest possible degree a system of liaison by radio between the various corps and divisional posts of command and the Air Service.

Probably the most valuable lesson of the entire campaign was the knowledge that neither the artillery nor the infantry of the United States Divisions here engaged had a sufficient knowledge or experience in the proper use and limitations of the observation Air Service of the corps. With one exception, these divisions were among the oldest in France. Their lack of proper training in the use of the Air Service arm forewarned the Corps Air Service as to what to expect in the future. It pointed up the need to devote the major portion of its efforts to the work of instructing both infantry and artillery in the employment of aerial observation before it could hope to realize the full measure of success in operations to be undertaken in the future. (End of extract from Circular No. 75.)

The Gorrell Report, as it is known at the National Archives, is otherwise entitled "The Final Report of the Chief of the Air Service, A.E.F." It was compiled after the Armistice at the direction of Col. Edward S. Gorrell, the historian of the Air Service, and contains many volumes of unit histories and description of the United States' aeronautical war effort.

The history of the 12th, however, as contained in Volume 3, Series E of the Report, is devoid of the very interesting reconnaissance and combat reports of the airmen that are so characteristic of other units. There are reports covering the deployment of aircraft, methods of infantry liaison, protection for photo missions, etc, but it is to the survivors of the Squadron that we must go for those illuminating accounts of everyday events.

It is not recorded in the Report for instance, that 23 of the officers received their first combat training with various French squadrons dating from January up to June nor that one of these was apparently the first American in United States uniform to shoot down an enemy aircraft in aerial combat.

The first available information concerning this event was the news item in the February 23, 1918 Literary Digest:

"A dispatch from American Army headquarters in France states that 20 enemy airplanes had tried to cross the American lines are turned back by anti-aircraft batteries. Artillery action continues day and night, and American heavy guns are registering well on the enemy positions. Two American aviators accompanying a French escadrille on a bombing expedition encounter an enemy squadron of eight planes. A general engagement ensued above the clouds and one of the Americans sent a German plane to the ground."

In November of 1918 the following letter of commendation was placed in the files of the American and French Armies:

GRAND QUARTIER GENERAL
Armees Francaises de L'Est
Bureau du Personnel
(Decorations) ORDER No. 12.027 "D" (Extrait)

Apres approbation du General Commandant en Chef les Forces expeditionnaires Americaines en France, le Marechal de France, Commandant en Chef les Armees Francaises de l'Est, cite a l'Order de l'Armee.

Lieutenant-Observateur Stephen, W. THOMPSON, a l'Escadrille Americaine 12:

"Observateur remarquable d'habilete, d'audace et de sang-froid. Le 28 Juillet 1918, au cours d'une liaison d'Infanterie, a engage le combat quatre avions ennemies; en a descendu en et fortement endommage un second. Descendu luimeme dans nos lignes au cours du combat a ete serieusement blesse. Avait deja descendu un appareil ennemie en Novembre au cours d'un bombardement de jour sur Sarrebruck."

Au Grand Quartier General, le 29 Novembre 1918.
Le Marechal de France
PETAIN

On the file copy of this letter at the Air Force Central Museum is a note with an arrow pointing to the word November in the last sentence of the text of the above letter, which states "Should read Feb. 5, 1918. The previous Nov. was Nov. 1917" and is signed "S.W. Thompson."

The following letter was dated November 13, 1930, on the letterhead of the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps, Washington:

Mrs. N.S. Thompson,
411 Park Place,
Austin, Texas

Dear Madam,

On November 6th during ceremonies incident to the presentation of the Medal of Honor to Captain Edward Rickenbacker at Bolling Field, Washington, D.C. the ex-members of Rickenbacker's old squadron, the 94th, were called to the microphone and introduced over the National Broadcasting system to the radio audience by Reed Chambers, one of their number.

Alan Winslow of River Forest, Illinois, was introduced as "the one officially credited with having brought down the first German plane while in the United States uniform." Investigation shows this

statement to be correct.

An account of the first victories, the one unofficial, the other official, as published, in the Air Corps News Letter, will be forwarded, to you in several days.

Yours truly,

Ira Longanecker,
Lieut. Colonel, Air Corps,
Chief, Information Division.

As mentioned above, the Air Corps News Letter of November 14, 1930, gave this account:

"Either one of the two Americans enjoys the distinction of having, while wearing the uniform of the United States Army, brought down the first enemy airplane in the World War. One's record is not confirmed officially, while the other's was witnessed, confirmed and made of record.

On February 5, 1918, Lieut. Stephen W. Thompson, formerly of West Plains, Mo. was a graduating student of the 1st Squadron Gunnery School at Cazeau, France.

On that particular morning the Commander of the 123rd French Breguet Squadron, operating near Neufchateau, called Major Ralph Royce, Commanding the 1st Squadron, and asked if he could spare a few of his observers, as the French Squadron was all out of observers, with no replacements in sight. Lieut. Thompson and a Lieut. R. M. Whitner of Atlanta, Ga., were the first two Americans sent over by Major Royce.

While on their way over the lines the flight was attacked by a number of German planes but managed to fight its way clear. After dropping their bombs on Saarburg (Saarbrücken), they were again attacked. This time, Lieut. Thompson, operating the rear guns on his Breguet, brought one of the enemy down. The statements of the rest of the pilots in the flight bore him out, but this victory was not confirmed. Due to earlier abuses of confirmations on "counting coup," it became the custom not to confirm victories unless they had been witnessed by someone from an organization other than that of the victor. Thompson later flew with the 12th Squadron and was officially credited with having brought down two enemy airplanes on July 28, 1918."

The News Letter goes on to give the account of Lt. Alan Winslow's victory, stating that "it crashed alongside the airdrome in full view of thousands of spectators." This occurred on April 14, 1918.

On March 7, 1933 Brig. General James F. McKinley, Acting Adjutant General, War Department, forwarded a copy of a letter from the Air Corps Military Attache in Berlin to Mr. Thompson, then historian of Post No. 5, American Legion, Dayton, Ohio.

"..... I have the honor to state that the matter has been investigated by Major Otto Wagner, Representative of the Historical Section of the Army War College at the German Federal Archives at Potsdam...

"The war diary of combat squadron No. 3 records the account of this squadron, consisting of seven single seaters, to meet a French air attack on Feb. 5, 1918 during the afternoon from 3:25 to 4:15.

"During the air combat, a pilot Lieutenant Vetter was wounded in the right index finger. Lieut. Vetter to avoid the fire of the enemy used falling tactics. But while falling the wings of his plane were damaged and the plane crashed just before landing. Lieut. Vetter did not receive any further injuries'...." (s) Jacob W. S. Wuest, Lieut. Col.
A. C. Military Attache

The story of his first victory was given in the Dayton, Ohio Daily News on January 7, 1934 at a time when Thompson and his friends were attempting to have his feat officially recognized. The Sunday issue of the News reported:

"...He was flying in a plane piloted by Lt. Du Vall. Thompson, ensconced in his pit, was armed with eight bombs and a machine gun. During the first part of the flight toward Saarbrücken, clouds interfered somewhat with the progress, but the French planes arose above them and when Saarbrücken was reached, the skies cleared and there was a splendid opportunity for the observers to drop their bombs.

"Soon after the attack on the German city was launched, a fleet of seven German planes took to the air to offer combat. One of the ships was assigned to give battle to the plane in which Thompson was stationed. As a part of the maneuvering the German plane dove under the one piloted by DuVall, carrying Thompson.

"As the German plane swooped under the French ship, Thompson opened fire with his machine gun, sending a volley of tracer bullets toward it. He plainly saw the German ship hurtle toward the earth after the volley had been unloosed, knowing that it had been injured...."

Major Royce had also heard from Thompson. In 1934 he wrote to Thompson stating that he had heard through War Department channels concerning the same matter but that he was forced to reply that he had no records or memoranda dealing with that period of his own career on which he could base any conclusion. He did remember that he had given permission for American officers to accompany the French airmen on a bombing raid and went on to say, "I believe at that time I made a recommendation regarding your actions on that flight."

The final letter in the Museum file was a copy of one from Harry S. Woodring, Asst. Secretary of War, dated April 20, 1935. In part it said, "In stating its inability to accept, as an official record...the War Department does not question the authenticity of his claim that a German airplane was destroyed on Feb. 5, 1918. However, before it could be definitely determined as to whether or not another individual member of the United States Army, while temporarily serving with the Allied air forces, was credited with having brought down an enemy prior to that date, the official military records of such Allied governments must necessarily be consulted."

At that particular time, 1935; the world situation was beginning to darken with vague threats of war. Hitler had come to power and was making trouble in various ways. Asst. Secretary Woodring said finally, "...the War Department feels that it would be inadvisable for it to inaugurate any action which would involve the official records of foreign governments."

In January 1935 the Congressman from his district, Byron S. Harlan, 3rd Ohio District, entered into the legislative hopper H. R. 1094, 74th Congress, 1st Session, a bill which proposed to declare Thompson the first officially credited victory for the U. S., requesting that an appropriately engraved medal be presented to him.

The foregoing was from the files of the Air Force Central Museum, Dayton, labeled "A compilation of data substantiating the claim of Lt. Thompson as being the first American to score an aerial victory against the enemy during the World War." Here, however, is a question of semantics. For in actuality there were many other Americans serving with both French and British forces who downed enemy aircraft long before 1918. However, they were in French or British uniform and, for the record, were enlisted under nationality other than United States.



Officers of the 12th Aero Squadron at Toul, France, probably sometime between September 7th and October 29th, 1918. Standing (from left to right including 3 men at far right): Harry Hawkes, Harold Muller, Gittenger (not 12th), Roland Bush, Finch (not 12th), Leslie McClurg, Gustin Follette, Maurice Owen, Frank Over, Jerold Belcher, Clifford Gregory, Clarence Smith, Leroy Lane, Eugene Stuck, Whitehurst Carner, Earl Radcliffe, Wm. Sandford, Burt Read and Ralph Keeley. Kneeling in middle row: Robert Davidson, Wistar Morris, Melville Hall, James Goodwin, William Thomas, Philip Schnur, Phil Henderson, Stephen H. Noyes, Sam Bowman, Frank Brewer, Sigourney Thayer and Cassius Styles. Kneeling in front row: Howard Fleason, Dogan Arthur, Jack Hyman, Jack Frost, Paul Stockton, Robert Paradise, Burdette Wright, Wilbur Kennedy, Herbert Dunn, Lee Rogers, Sidney Beauclerk and Henry Holden. (Photo-Cassius H. Styles)

As One Of the most experienced squadrons, the 12th was to have many of its men reassigned and promoted to other units as the War progressed. Hughes, who had been with the 12th from October 1917, became commanding officer of the 183rd; Wade was assigned to the office of the Chief of Air Service, 1st Army Corps; and Brereton was promoted to C. O. of the 1st Corps Observation Group. Haslett went to the 1st Obs. Group as Operations Officer and Harwood, Henderson and Hopkins also went to assignments at Group headquarters. Kennedy was made C. O. of the 186th with Read as Operations. Paradise replaced Noyes as C. O. of the 12th when Noyes took over as C. O. Of the newly formed 5th Corps Obs. Group.

There were 16 casualties (not including 9 wounded in action); Hinds, Goodale and Orr being killed in crashes, while the rest were either killed in action, missing in action or were made prisoners of war:

Angell, Cyril N., 2nd Lt., Pilot, K.I.A. 5-14-18
 Baker, Alfred B., 2nd Lt., Pilot, P.O.W. 7-28-18
 Beauclerk, S. W., 1st Lt., Pilot, K.I.A. 10-29-18
 Bradford, A. J., 1st Lt., Obs., K.I.A. 7-25-18
 Emerson, W. K. B., 2nd Lt., Obs., K.I.A. 5-14-18
 Fay, John M., 2nd Lt., Radio, P.O.W. 10-30-18
 Joerg, A. N., 1st Lt., Pilot, Missing 7-25-18
 Lumsden, J. C., 2nd Lt., Obs., K.I.A. 7-28-18
 Miller, John C., 1st Lt., Pilot, K.I.A. 7-28-18
 Morris, Wistar, 1st Lt., Pilot, K.I.A. 9-29-18
 Muller, Harold D., 1st Lt., Pilot, P.O.W. 10-30-18
 Patterson, Robert A., 1st Lt., Obs., P.O.W. 10-29-18
 Styles, Cassius H., 1st Lt., Obs., P.O.W. 9-29-18

From the dry figures in the 12th's unit history we learn that there were, between August 10 and the Armistice, or from the St. Mihiel offensive onward, 25,000

cartridges fired at enemy troops. There were 82 combats in 598 Service hours, 74 infantry liaison missions, five special missions, etc. The Chronological Report of Operations, August 10 to November 11, for the 29th of October reads:

"...Miscellaneous: 1 plane from 12th, Lt. Beauclerk, Pilot and Lt. Patterson, Observer, on protection flight for photography mission failed to return. Time: 3:55-...."

To find out what was behind this simple statement we had to go to the Prisoner-of-War reports, filed by all but two of the 146 U. S. Air Service airmen, for the account of Lt. Robert A. Patterson.

Patterson lives today in Havre, Montana, having retired from business in 1960. He gave a long and well detailed account of his captivity which started the day before Foy and Muller were shot down. Actually, Patterson was very lucky. Lt. Sidney A. Beauclerk was piloting No. 2, with Patterson as observer in a formation of five Salmsons, one a photo ship, with the others giving protection. They crossed the lines near Champigneulle in the morning and were attacked by a formation of seven Fokkers. These enemy pilots were very good. In a letter to Russell Manning on July 31, 1963, Patterson wrote that he thought they might have been from the Richthofen Circus:

"A dark blue Fokker got under us and killed Lt. Beauclerk (Beauclerk) with a burst of about six shots. The Salmson went into a steep dive and then broke into a tight spiral. As soon as I was able

to regain my feet I looked over toward the pilot and saw him slumped forward. I unbuckled my belt (we wore belts attached to the swivel gun) and had started to climb over the pilot's cockpit when I was hit across the head with a bullet. The centrifugal force of the spiral must have sucked me back into the cockpit because the next thing I knew I was sitting up surrounded by five big Prussian Guards with American shells bursting about 50 yards back of us in a small field. About 20 yards in front of me was the plane all smashed up. My head and face were bandaged up in good shape...I was able to walk to a first aid station."

Lt. Burdette S. Wright, who was on the same mission, later gave Patterson the account of the crash which he put in his P.O.W. report in early 1919: "Our ship went into a nosedive and came out into a spiral with the wings practically perpendicular to the ground. The engines was wide open and we spiralled down into the ground, the ship striking the ground on its wing, the fuselage shot ahead but held together which probably accounts for my escape." He was taken to Karlsruhe and eventually got back to France through Switzerland.

Baker was on a protection mission with Lumsden as Observer over Fere-en-Tardenois when they were attacked by eight Fokkers. The fight started about five miles over the lines and, as they were about to get away, Lumsden was shot in the head and killed. Baker submitted his report after his release from Landshut prison after the Armistice.

"Just before the Boche machines attacked us Jack Lumsden said to me through the tube, 'Bake, we've got to keep them off John', John being the way he designated the other machine piloted by John Miller. During the fight I twice heard Jack stop shooting at machines that were attacking us...in order to fire at others which were giving it to John and to my mind he put up as splendid and brave a fight as possibly can be imagined..."

"I was hit five times by one burst from an enemy plane and my gas tank was hit by an explosive bullet tearing away one side of it... As the whole fight took place at a height of not over 250 meters, I was unable to glide back over the lines and landed just behind the lines in a gun pit of a battery of enemy 77s..."

Baker was fairly treated but the food was very poor, and lack of immediate and proper treatment for his wounds left a bad scar on his face for a long time afterward. He died in 1953.

Foy had been in the 12th during May and had been assigned as the radio officer for the 1st Corps Observation Group. In October, at a point when the 12th Aero was short of Observers, he volunteered, and became probably, the only radio officer in the Air Service made prisoner during the war. It was his first, and last trip over the lines. Three Salmsons from the 12th crossed the lines about 11:00 on the morning of the 30th and were attacked by 18 Fokkers behind Buzancy at about 2200 meters. The engine was damaged and stopped and the controls being out of commission they crashed between the enemy infantry and artillery lines. His pilot, Muller, was stated by Foy to have been wounded in the head by a bullet and both received bruises and cuts from the crash.

Muller and Foy were both taken to the rear through a series of posts of command, interrogated, and finally sent to Karlsruhe where they stayed a few days at the famous Hotel d'Angleterre, and then on to Karlsruhe prison. They were only detained a few days though as the Armistice came and they were evacuated out through Switzerland. Muller and Foy are both living, Muller in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania and Foy in Los Angeles.

Muller did not mention that he had been wounded in

the head, but he did say that "We got a damn sight better treatment in Germany than we had in France as cadets." He reported that at Montmedy, one of their stops on the way to Karlsruhe, a typical German ruse to secure information for the Intelligence Department was as follows:

"The huns turned loose among the prisoners a 'Sous-Lieutenant' who reported himself as having served in the French Tank Corps. Apparently he was one of their number and they (the prisoners) entered into some discussions with him. He got away with the trick until he began to quiz a French Corporal, when by the nature of his questions and manner they realized he was a stool pigeon..."

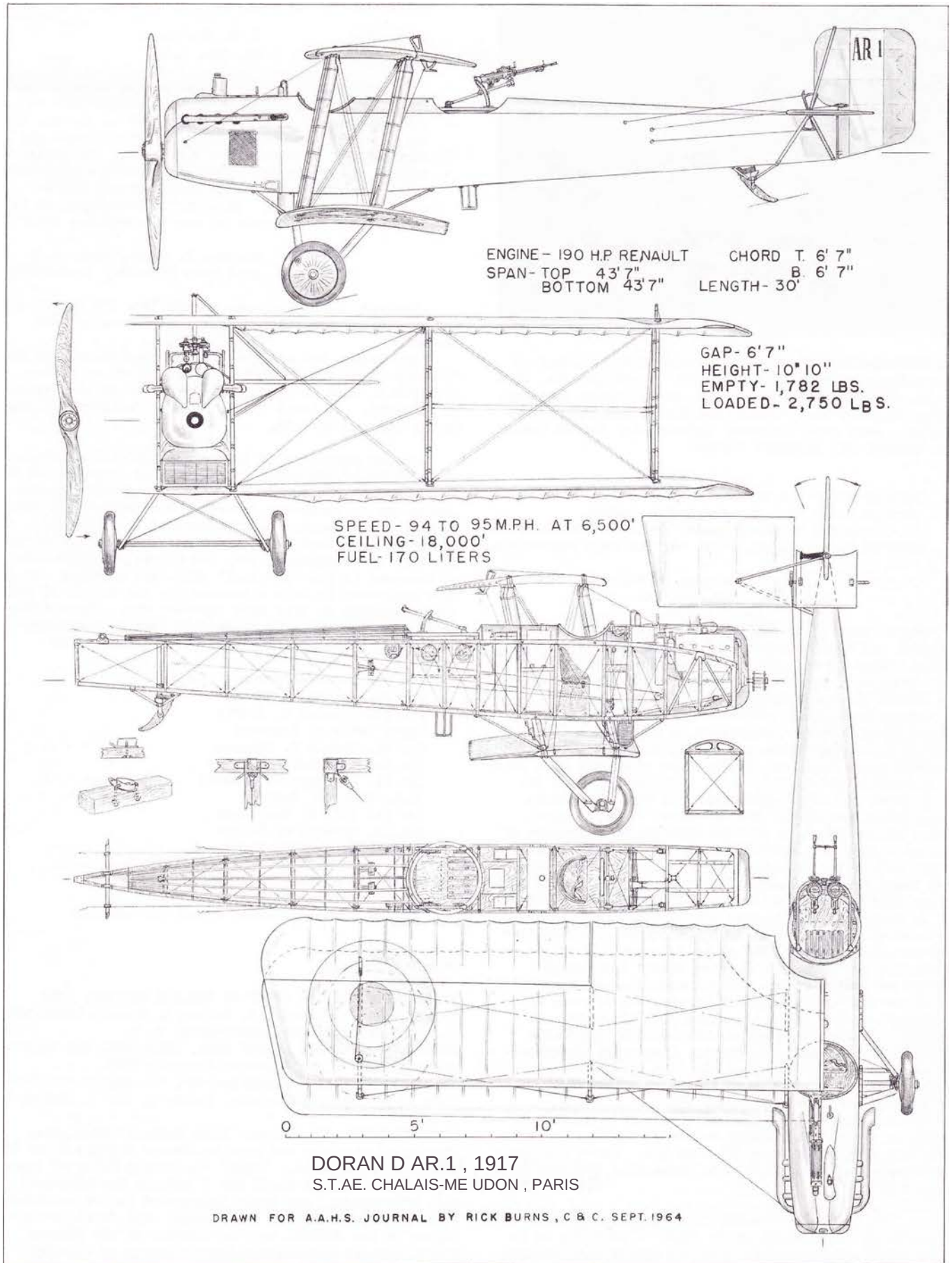
The P.O.W. report of Lt. Cassius H. Styles was to figure very prominently in his life almost 12 years later. He had become the victim of a curious set of circumstances which were never set aright until 1960, when Styles obtained a copy of the report to set his WWI service record straight.

Styles stayed in the Air Service until 1922, then being retired for medical reasons. At the very beginning of WWII he was offered a post as executive officer at a West Coast air base by Gen. George Kenney, but that offer never cleared his Washington, D. C. personnel file. His entire World War One service record had been erased."

The report which again established the basis for a WWI service record reads:

To: Air Service Commander, 3rd Army, A.E.F.

1. When I was captured, the 29th of September, my rank was 1st Lieutenant and my organization was the 12th Aero Squadron. The place was between Cornay and Fleville, on the Aire River, north of Varennes, in the Argonne sector.
2. My pilot, Lt. Wistar Morris, and I had completed a mission at Apremont. We had after that returned to the field at Rarecourt, where Army headquarters were, and left them a report of the above mission and infantry liaison. Then we had gone to the front again for a reconnaissance, and having sufficient gasoline, had gone well over the lines to have a look at Fleville. While there we saw a German battery of field artillery crossing an open field west of the Aire River. We attacked them with our machine guns, and put two of the four cannon and their horses out of commission. One gun tumbled into the river. As a machine gun was set up to fire at us we silenced it with a couple of bursts from our guns. When there were no more soldiers in sight we again returned to headquarters and made another report. Then we left to go home, but as we had more gas than we needed we decided to take another look at Fleville. When we reached there we saw a good number of soldiers around the second cannon we had shot up and started firing on them. After a few bursts we were hit by a machine gun hidden in some bushes. We crashed and a few minutes afterward Lt. Morris died although first aid was given him by some German soldiers. A German artillery Lieutenant, who was in command of an anti-aircraft battery, put us both on one of his trucks and hurried us to the nearest field hospital at Marcq. Lt. Morris was too severely wounded to reach the hospital and died just before we reached it.
3. The reasons why we were captured were that we were both severely hurt when we fell, seven kilometers inside the German lines, and were unable to run to safety. There was a crowd of Germans around the wreck before I could crawl out. The reason that we fell so far back and did not glide back to the lines was that we were flying at a height of not more than a hundred meters.
4. I do not believe that any lesson could be deduced from my capture. I simply had the luck to





At Headquarters, Air Service, 4th Army Corps, Army of Occupation, Sinzig, Germany, 1919. Front row: Lt. Otto Trunk, Helen Somers (Red Cross), Capt. Robert Paradise, C.O., Unknown, Miss Peters (Red. Cross) and Lt. Cassius Styles. Back row: Unknown, Unknown, Lt. Claude Buncan, Lt. Vaughn, Lt. Bartlett Beaman.

have my pilot and motor run into machine gun fire, through which luck had carried us before.
5. Treatment by the Germans, now that I look at it with my blood cooled, I can say was very reasonable.

Cassius H. Styles
1st Lt., Inf., U.S.A.

Styles went on to tell how he was transferred to a hospital and eventually through Switzerland to France. He was posted to the Army of Occupation at 4th Corps Obs. Group H.Q. under Capt. Paradise and returned to the States in June 1919.

After his medical retirement, Styles went into the mountains of northern California to regain his health, learned to hunt with bow and arrow, and went into the sporting goods business, making bows that were much prized by archers around the world, until WWII. When his appointment did not come through, he went to work in Mare Island Navy Yard. The old ghost arose in 1952, when a review was made of Army retirements. Because of lack of a personnel record during WWI, he was forced to return all of the interim-period retirement pay. He then began the long search for Official records and witnesses which was to take him until 1960 to establish.

In actuality, Styles was one of the first Air Service men assigned to the Front for combat. Having come overseas in September 1917 as an Infantry officer, he attended the 1st Corps Air Service school but the Air Service at that time was not yet equipping with aircraft, and since the French Army Air Service was in need of personnel, he was assigned, along with 15 others, to service in a French Squadron. He went to Escadrille Bre 211, on the Champagne Front. Stephen W. Thompson, who went to Breguet Squadron 123, and Bradley Saunders, later C.O. of the 135th Aero Sqdn., were assigned on the same order dated 5 February 1918.

Styles served in the French unit until May, was assigned to the aerial gunnery course at Cazeau, and then went back to the 12th Aero on June 9th. After the War, the recommendations made by his commanding officers were as follows:

"Lt. Styles has served in my organization and under my observation for a year. I know him to be a conscientious officer, and an exceptionally courageous and skillful observer. He was at the front

continually for a year and has been recommended for decoration by the French for meritorious service."

L. H. Brereton,
Lt. Col. A.S.

"During the time Lt. Styles was an observer with the 12th Aero Squadron he took an active part on the Chateau-Thierry offensive, the drive on the St. Mihiel salient and the Argonne Offensive (until his capture by the enemy a few days before the Armistice). His principal work was infantry contact missions, in which work he rendered exceptionally meritorious service. It is to officers such as Lt. Styles that the success of the Squadron was due."

Stephen S. Noyes, Capt. A.S.
12th Aero Squadron, Commanding

However, as Styles says today, "Now I'm out of debt, and my clothes are presentable. And I have my self respect."

Lt. Styles was assigned to the Headquarters of the 4th Army Corps Air Service upon his return to France from P.O.W. camp in Germany and returned to the States in mid-1919. He lives in St. Helena, California today, having retired in 1960.

In the next part of this series we will continue the history of the 12th, as told by the officers and men who served in the Squadron. Many of these men became successful in business, industry, the law and the military in later years. As a product of their spirit, training, experiences and the time, the WW I combat air-men were an exceptional lot. Of course, none of this is recorded in the "official" 12th Aero history. It is even necessary to look elsewhere for the awards of decorations given to 12th Aero Squadron men. These interesting accounts will be related in Part 2, including the citations of the Distinguished Service Cross for:

2nd Lt. Dogan H. Arthur
2nd Lt. Samuel A. Bowman
2nd Lt. Clinton S. Breese
Major Lewis H. Brereton
2nd Lt. Harold T. Fleeson
1st Lt. Justin P. Follette
1st Lt. Benjamin P. Harwood
Capt. Elmer R. Haslett
1st Lt. Phil A. Henderson
1st Lt. Kenneth H. Holden
Captain Stephen H. Noyes
1st Lt. Edward Orr
1st Lt. Robert C. Paradise
Captain William H. Saunders
Captain Robert Vallois, French Air Service

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: The Dorand "Army Renault" three-view drawing on page 187 was made by Member Richard Burns of Torrance, California. "Rick" has made a hobby of drawing the aircraft of World War I for his own amusement and, fortunately, for those interested in the construction of the aircraft of the period. His first contribution to the JOURNAL was the drawing of the Salmson S.A.L. 2A2 which accompanied the History of the 88th Aero Squadron in Volume 5, Number 3.