



A Bit About the Twelfth Aero

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INSIGNIAS have existed for years, and are a fine means of building up the spirit of a body or organization. They are, as a rule, symbolical of the ideals or the lines of effort, and are a great source of interest both to those working along the same lines and to the layman.

Such was the case in the World War. Authority was given the squadrons of the Air Service to adopt individual insignias. The Lafayette Escadrille, which was composed of Americans in the French Aviation Service, had already adopted the Indian's head for its insignia—that being characteristic of the Frenchman's idea of the American.

When the 12th Aero Squadron, at Toul, reached the point of making a decision as to the individual marking to be carried on its planes, it turned to the thought of the work they were doing at the Front. Both in the Baccarat-Luneville Sector and the Toul Sector, owing to the comparatively peaceful operations being carried on at that time, the major portion of the work consisted in observation for the artillery of the divisions with which they were cooperating. It was then decided that the insignia should be symbolical of this work, and the design of an eagle in flight, directing the course of an artillery shell, was chosen. Unfortunately, it was difficult from an artistic point of view to make a definite picture of this thought, and, as the planes of the 12th flew in their work carrying this insignia, many mistakes were made in considering that the outfit must be a bombardment squadron and that the eagle, symbolizing the plane, must be clutching in its claws an aircraft bomb.

In contradiction to both the original idea of this insignia and to the mistaken idea later developed, the squadron, as time went on, decreased to a great extent its work in artillery and turned out to be a unit which probably carried out more infantry liaison missions than any other American squadron at the Front.

As the writer is only familiar with the operations of the Squadron through the Chateau-Thierry, the Saint-Mihiel, and the Argonne-Meuse operations, the work of the 12th can be described from first-hand knowledge during those periods only.

A divisional squadron during the World War, with the great demand for aviation and the comparatively small supply, had an opportunity for all-around work in observation. The missions of the squadron included artillery adjustments, surveillance, infantry liaison, command, propaganda dropping, and photographic and protection missions. The carrying out of these different types of missions resulted in the accumulation of varied experience on the part of the personnel. The Operations Officer of the squadron working in conjunction with the Engineering Officer many times had a difficult problem due to the great demand and to the small number of planes that were in commission. As time went on and experience was gained, the percentage of planes in commission increased rapidly, and, toward the end, no trouble was experienced in this regard, but, in opposition to it, the shortage of personnel was felt.

I REMEMBER one morning toward the end of the Argonne operation. A great many assignments had been made and at the last minute, a call came in for a photographic mission. Owing to some experience in the past with photographic missions and the sad attempt at being able to obtain sufficient pursuit aviation for protection the Operations Officer deemed it necessary to send five planes on the mission—one to take the photographs and four to complete the "V" formation for the purpose of protection, one of the four to have photographic equipment in case the first plane went down.

A shortage of observers existed at the time, and the Group Radio Officer—Eddie Foy—volunteered to act as occupant in the back seat of one of the planes. He admitted that he knew a great deal about machine gun work and Muller volunteered to take him. The mission took off and after gaining altitude proceeded across the lines. When in the vicinity of Buzancy—one of the towns northeast of Grand Pre—the outfit was attacked by a large formation of Huns. The leading plane was driven out of the formation and fell to the ground. It crashed in No Man's Land after descending 500 meters in flames. Fortunately, both pilot and

observer were able to get out and make their way to American outposts, occupying shell holes, where they received temporary shelter until an opportunity was presented to regain our lines.

The next plane to be driven down was that occupied by Arthur and Fleeson, and they were followed through a dive of 2,000 meters in which the motor was cooled to such an extent that Arthur was about to make a landing when it began to pick up and he was able to limp across the lines. This plane had suffered a great deal of punishment from machine-gun fire, and in addition the struts were raked some two inches so that both flying wires and landing wires were tightened until they would have made a good musical pitch for high "C." Arthur stuck with it, however, and got the plane back to the airdome.

The third plane to suffer from the attack was carrying Eddie Foy, who in the diving fight which ensued received a scalp wound from machine-gun fire. The plane crashed in Hun territory, and Eddie was made a prisoner. I believe he can claim the distinction of being the only non-flyer in the Air Service to be wounded and taken prisoner as a result of aerial combat.

It will be easily understood that the photographs were not taken by that mission and that as a result a great cry was made by the squadron for more protection when going on deep missions into the enemy territory at high altitude for photographic work.

NO PARTICULAR type of mission, however, could be looked upon as having the greatest liability of attack from enemy forces. We had one case where a team was sent across for the purpose of dropping propaganda some four or five kilometers across the lines. Of course, missions of this type were subject to attack because propaganda, being released, fluttered in the breeze and resembled a large flock of birds easily calling attention to the kind of work that plane was doing over the lines. Knowledge of this sort of mission was a thorn to any of the enemy in its vicinity, and there were strict instructions to make every effort to down an adversary engaged in such work. Many times it seemed that the throwing of propaganda called forth Boche from all over the skies, and two or more patrols would be centered with the aid of the Boche anti-aircraft signals upon the plane. Arthur and Fleeson had an experience in this work, and were just able to glide across the lines with their motor shot by the Hun machine gun fire.

As experience was gained at the Front, resulting from the numerous missions carried out with the

Infantry in the front lines, more and more demand was made upon the 12th for Infantry missions. It finally became necessary to assign three teams to that work exclusively. This, of course, was logical, because a man flying continuously at low altitude became thoroughly accustomed to the work and to the use of the large scale maps, and could therefore be much more efficient in his observations. The confidence of the Infantry Division commanders was gradually built up. They grew to value the work of the Infantry planes, and of necessity many times had to rely solely upon their reports in order to ascertain the exact location of their troops.

As an example of the change in attitude of the commanders with reference to the information brought back, the two following instances form a good contrast. A day or so after the beginning of the Chateau Thierry offensive, Lieutenants Baker and Bowman reported a small group of Americans some two kilometers in advance of our main line of outpost, and suffering from both the American and German barrages. The Information Section of the 26th Division, upon receipt of this report, said that it was impossible; that some mistake had been made in the observation of the uniform or character of the troops, and that the division was entirely informed as to its personnel. Consequently, no efforts were made, as far as I know, to check this information and possibly drive a wedge to the locality to rescue the troops.

It was a matter of only a few days after that when Baker, with Lumsden as observer and another team following as protection, were attacked by Germans and the protection team brought down on our side of the lines with the pilot killed, and Baker brought down in the German lines with his observer killed. Baker had, I believe, five bullet holes through him, but none so serious but that he could "navigate" very well.

Afterwards he was sent back to Karlsruhe to the prison camp and there met an officer with whom he conversed about his experiences. It turned out that this officer had been in the group of men who had signalled to them, whom Bowman had reported as Americans suffering from the German and American barrages. Post mortems are not always the most pleasant breeders of thought, but they make for experience and better performance next time.

IN CONTRAST to this lack of confidence in aerial observation reports we find that towards the end of the Argonne many calls for aid were made daily in efforts to locate troops. I remember one evening, with weather conditions practically impossible, fog just over the tree-tops and a dense,

misty rain, that the command of the 82nd Division called our squadron, stating that the troops near Verpel just east of Grand Pre were not in contact with Division Headquarters, and it was urgently requested that a plane be sent to find their position.

"Steve" Noyes, Commanding Officer of the 12th, knowing that darkness would fall before the completion of the mission, would not send anyone else but piloted the plane himself, taking Follette as observer. He carried out the mission, found the troops, returned and landed near the headquarters of the 82nd Division along the banks of the Aire near Chatel Cherery, landing after dark. He reported the troops, and just afterwards a runner came through with the information which checked up exactly. Nothing could more glaringly illustrate the ability of aviation to perform service of extreme importance nor the caliber of men in command of our units.

It would be possible to write a book on the individual experiences of the men of the 12th, which would also be true of the work of any of the other American squadrons on the Front, for they all had fine personnel, the highest type of morale and sense of duty.

The mission of observation aviation was to be the eyes of the commanders of units with which they worked, and it served the purpose against all odds. In the French schools where we were taught the work of Infantry Liaison, they told us that we should fly at 500 meters; that is, about 1,500 feet, and when signalling for panels or other signs the troops had their part to play in answering our signal. As a matter of fact, not enough stress was laid on this matter in the training of the troops on the ground or upon the necessity for them to carry these panels for use with the airplanes; and they were thus unable, without panels, to signal properly. As a result, the American aviator had to go sufficiently low in his observation to identify the uniform of the soldier, and owing to the small differentiation existing between the dirty gray-green of the Boche and the muddy olive drab of the American, this altitude varied usually from 75 to 200 meters, or approximately from 200 to 600 feet.

It was actually found, after a great many missions had been flown with the Infantry at this low altitude, that it was a safer height than 500 meters, which the French adopted, owing to the fact that one came upon his ground defenses so fast and their angular change in firing was so rapid that it was almost impossible to hit the plane. Their only

real opportunity was in placing a heavy barrage in front of the plane and allowing the plane to fly through it. This, however, was counteracted by a slight skidding of the plane which threw its direction of motion off the apparent line of flight.

THESE few experiences give only a small idea of the work, varied as it was in kind, but are written to convey to the reader an idea of the duties of a divisional observation squadron in the War. It was one of the most interesting assignments that an aviator could have, as he was compelled at all times to be entirely conversant with the battle orders, plans of employment, and the progress of the troops, also the terrain over which they were passing. In the next war, with the training which is being given now and with the large accumulation of valuable experience from which we now are able to draw our lessons, the work should not only be most interesting but without doubt will prove of unlimited value. It is hoped that the peace-time training of the ground troops will thoroughly cover their side of the work.

Chanute Field's Hospitality to Reserve Officers

Mt. Pleasant, Mich.

EDITOR, U. S. AIR SERVICE,

Dear Sir:

I returned to the Army for a month this summer as instructor at the C. M. T. C. at Grant. On my way home stopped at Chanute Field for a week and was given a chance to fly every forenoon and one afternoon to compensate for a morning we missed on account of rain. My reason for writing this is to tell you how fine Reserve Officers are treated at that field. Every possible courtesy is accorded them and they are allowed to fly every available minute; the regulars helping in every way they can. Made three trips dual and then soloed the remainder of the week. The Regular officers at this field, at any rate, are doing all it is in their power to do to keep Army flyers in the air.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) GEORGE T. LUSK,
2d Lt. A. S. R. C., A. O., R. M. A.