

10th Aero Squadron. #

The 10th Aero Squadron was organized on May 31, 1917, at Kelly Field, Texas, with Major (then Captain) John C. McDonnell, J.M.A., S.C., in command.

Of the Companies of the Provisional Aviation Camp, Captain McDonnell chose Company I, First Regiment out of which to form the Squadron.

From June 19, to the date of departure the Squadron was one of the busiest places in camp. Equipment and supplies had to be requisitioned, the records of each man had to be prepared, and above all, the men composing the Squadron, had to be changed from recruits to soldiers. When Headquarters, Kelly Field, issued No. 46, July 5, ordering <sup>Special Order</sup> the:-

"10th Aero Squadron, Signal Corps, to proceed to Signal Corps, Aviation School, Rantoul, Illinois."

The squadron left Kelly Field with the reputation of being one of the best in camp.

On the night of July 4, one of the most destructive storms of the year swept across the camp. Tents were blown down, equipment soaked and every man in camp drenched to the skin. Company streets were changed into lakes and pools of water covered the floor of every tent. On the following morning, the day of departure, that part of Kelly Field not under water was a quagmire. The squadron was due to leave at 1:00 P.M., but it required from early in the morning until late in the afternoon to complete the loading of equipment. The squadron arrived at Rantoul and detrained in the afternoon of July 7, the first Aero Squadron to enter the Chanute Aviation Field.

This field was located just outside and bordering on the edge of Rantoul, and covered an area of approximately one square mile. It consisted of the flying field, a double row of barracks capable of accomodating six squadrons, with quarters for the squadron and

field staff officers just north of the barracks, and separated from them by a large modern hospital. The hangars, were, located between the flying field and the barracks, large wooden structures approximately two hundred feet long and fifty feet wide, capable of holding from six to eight large Curtiss JN - 4 flying machines; they extended from end to end of the field, parallel to the barracks, twelve in all.

was  
The field/still under construction, and it was not until several weeks later, upon the completion of the machine shop and the installation of the lathes and drill presses, that the first wheels were turned which signified the beginning of Chanute Field as an aviation instruction field. The men of the Squadron were assigned to the machine shop for motor repair and testing, carburetor and magneto repair and adjustment, and trouble shooting. Late in July and early in August, the assembly and erection and repair shop was organized to assemble the 'planes which began to arrive almost daily.

On July 26, the first Cadet Detachment arrived to undergo flying instruction. The first week in August marked the real start of flying training. About this time there were twenty-five machines on the field and about fifty students, most of whom had never been up in a machine. It was not long before motors and machines were turned over to the Engineering Dept., for every kind of repair. This necessitated the re-organization of the Repair Dept., separate departments soon branched out, - wing repair, fuselage repair, and motor installation. With the installation of band saws and wood-working machinery, 'planes were almost built completely on the field.

The arrival of the 38th and 39th Aero Squadrons, during the latter part of August, formed a welcome addition to the force then at Chanute Field; as the rapidly expanding field increased the work proportionately, this increase in the number of men at the station further increased the flying time so that during September there were 110 at the Cadet Detachment.

On September 28, 1917, the Squadron lost its commanding

officer, Major McDonnell, having received orders to proceed to Selfridge Field, at Mt. Clemons, Michigan, to take up more important duties.

After the intense heat, leaky tents and uncomfortable cots of Kelly Field, the electric lighted, steam heated barracks at Rantoul, with hot and cold water showers, spring beds with mattresses and feather pillows, were much appreciated by the men. The people of nearby towns built up a strong friendship between themselves and the men of Chanute Field.

It was a day of great celebration when Headquarters, Chanute Field, ordered the Squadron to prepare for service overseas, on October 25, 1917. While this order intended that every man of the Squadron should leave with the organization, it was discovered on checking up that many of them held positions of such responsibility at the field, that it was decided to transfer these men out of the Squadron. The next week was spent in packing and marking all the additional equipment of the new men who were transferred into the Squadron. When 1st Lieut. Gilmore L. Tilbrook, S.C., (who had been appointed in command when Major McDonnell, S.C., was relieved) received Special Order No. 63, Headquarters, SCAS., Chanute Field, to entrain at the Rantoul siding at 10:00 P.M. it was not more than an hour after the train drew into the siding, that the Squadron was on its way eastward to the Atlantic coast.

On November 3, the Squadron arrived at the Concentration Camp at Garden City, Long Island, New York, to await embarkation orders. The next three weeks was a long, tedious wait to the men, but this time was completely occupied with drill morning and afternoon, instructions in pitching shelter tents, and the correct method of making up a "pack". Equipment inspections were regular and frequent and any deficiencies or unserviceable articles of equipment were immediately drawn or replaced, so the Squadron left the States with the finest and best possible equipment.

On the evening of December 3, 1917, the Headquarters S.C.,

Concentration Camp, Garden City, notified Squadron Headquarters to prepare to move in six hours, and late that night the Squadron started on the journey to the port of embarkation. Six o'clock the following morning the Squadron detrained at the Philadelphia Navy Yard and a few hours later were aboard the S.S. Northland. During the early morning of December 5, the Northland steamed down the bay and out into the Atlantic. On the morning of the 8th, anchor was dropped off the town of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Halifax, usually one of the busiest and most prosperous towns in Canada, presented a mournful sight after the explosion of thousands of tons of high explosive on board a munition ship. As the reports of the disaster were carried aboard the ship by the officers and sailors on shore leave, it was decided to collect a fund to alleviate the sufferings of the inhabitants, the total of which amounted to several thousand dollars from the Northland. The Mayor of the town in a message a few days later expressed his thanks to the squadron.

On the morning of the 15th, the Northland swung out into the stream and into place in the convoy, consisting of nine ships in all. Christmas day the skeleton work of the New Brighton Light of Liverpool, England, appeared over the bow and by noon the Northland dropped anchor in the river Mersey. The troops were quickly landed that night, and as the landing stage was but a short distance from the trains, little time was lost in transferring the baggage from the floats to the small, square box-like Continental freight cars, the loading of which was completed shortly before mid-night. The morning of December 26, the train steamed into Southampton, the port of embarkation to France. Late in the afternoon the men were marched aboard the Marguerite for transport across the channel.

The Marguerite was an ancient channel boat of the side wheeler type. In design and size it resembled Fulton's first attempt to propel boats by steam. The name plate in the saloon had long since been worn smooth and the date of launching was obliterated but upon

close inspection the figures 1, 6, 4, and 8 were discernible and it was unanimously agreed that this must be the date of her first trip across the channel. Made almost entirely of wood, every joint and beam gave out a mournful squeak, as her engines wheezed and her paddles dipped in the water. She slowly wheeled about and pointed her nose towards the coast of France. The morning of December 27, found the Marguerite bumping against the breakwater and slowly winding her way up to the wharves of the French seaport of Le Havre. The troops disembarked about noon, and marched up hill to <sup>the</sup> Rest Camp, about eight miles from the wharves.

The Rest Camp consisted of about a dozen rows of small conical tents about twelve feet in diameter, to which from eight to ten men were assigned, the men sleeping on the ground. The Camp was located on the heights that overlooked the city and exposed on all sides to the penetrating cold winds that swept across the heights from the Atlantic. As the sides of the tents often lacked from four to six inches of touching the ground, the snow, which was then six inches deep, blew in under the tent flaps, spreading a layer of snow over everyone during the night.

It was with little regret the men left Rest Camp No. 1 at Le Havre, and marched down to the Railway terminal to entrain once more. When the Squadrons arrived at the terminal they experienced for the first time, travel "a la guerre". The coaches were plainly marked "8 chevaux" or "40 hommes", the sides of the car were without windows but with large sliding doors on each side, furnishing ample ventilation and light; especially ventilation, with the temperature at about 20 below. The floor of the coach was covered with straw with a lingering odor that suggested the late departure of the "8 chevaux". Four squads were assigned to each car, about thirty men in each one. Sleeping accommodations were again a problem. The man who had figured "40 Chevaux" per car had evidently reasoned that the "hommes" like the "chevaux" would sleep standing up. Standing up, thirty Yank "hommes"

made a close fit in this French coach, but finding room to sleep thirty Yank "hommes" was something else again, so much so, that the individual and collective ideas of the carload, failed to find the answer during the following two nights.

At Daybreak on January 1st, the men detrained, and marched off through the little town of St. Maixent to the large French armory, Canclaux Barracks. The Squadron spent almost the entire month of January at this place, and except for the time when the Squadron was not drilling, liberty passes were allowed to the men to visit the town and get their first look at France. The rations though were somewhat scarce, consisting of "corned willy" three times a day, occasionally some jam, and no "seconds".

On Jan. 26, 1918, the Squadron once again entrained and started under way to "America's largest aviation camp in France" at Issoudun, Indre, France, arriving on the afternoon of January 27, which marked the date when the Squadron was once more to start in service, as part of the organization to maintain an aviation center, almost three months after leaving its last aviation station - Chanute Field, Rantoul, Illinois.

As the Squadron had not had any previous experience on the small, fast chasse French 'planes, the mechanics were schooled in the care and repair of these new flying ships during the following two or three weeks.

The new post was known as the Third Aviation Instruction Center, consisting of (at that time) seven fields, each field training the pilots in some one particular phase of the complete training.

On February 7, 1918, the Squadron left the Main Field and proceeded to Field 7, which was located about fifteen kilometers from the Main Camp. The unit remained at this field, acquiring further knowledge and experience on the care and maintenance of the 'planes used in training. On February 20, 1918, Headquarters, 3rd A.I.C. issued a Memo directing the Tenth Aero Squadron to proceed to a location about

ten kilometers from Field 7, to start the new combat field of the Center, Field 8.

On the day the Squadron arrived at Field 8, the Field consisted of (two barracks,) two partially erected barracks and, due to the constant drizzle of several days, <sup>was</sup> a huge mud-hole. The Squadron for the next two or three weeks, shouldered the arms of the Aviation, <sup>section</sup> the pick and shovel, and proceeded to change the mud hole, known officially as Field 8, into a place to live and an aviation training field. They were assisted in this by the 644th Aero Squadron, who arrived several weeks after the arrival of the Tenth Squadron. The partially completed barracks were finished, new ones erected and completed, latrines sunk, the administration building being the last to be finished.

During the latter part of the month the first large canvas hangar arrived from the Main Field, and work was immediately commenced on its erection which was soon completed, followed closely by two others so that when the first 'planes arrived, about the second week of March, 1918, they were run into the hangars and the Field was ready to commence training.

Captain James A Buchanan, A.S., was the first commanding officer of the Field, assigned February 21, 1918. The early weeks of March, were spent in the organization of the Field Training Headquarters, and on March 13, 1918, the first 'plane "took off", No. 321, type 27 Nieuport, marking the beginning of flying instruction at Field 8.

The following months witnessed the gradual expansion of the Field, several more hangars being erected and more 'planes added to the Field. The work of the crew men, consisted in the care of the 'planes, keeping them tuned up and the making of minor repairs. Major repairs were sent to the Main Camp, but as the number of machines increased, it was found more efficient to make all repairs at Field 8, as it required less time and economized transportation. This necessitated the organization of major repair hangar, which was put in charge of one of the first-class Sergeants of the Squadron. Motor repairs,

except slight ones were sent to the machine shop at the Main Field, but to make a better arrangement a hangar was set aside for all 'planes that required motors to be changed or have new motors installed.

On September 8, 1918, 1st Lieut. Gilmore L. Tilbrook, A.S., who had commanded the Squadron for almost the past year, was relieved from command by Major M. F. Davis, A.S., and left for duty with the Air Service Technical Division at Paris, France. Having been with the Tenth Aero Squadron ever since its inauguration, he had become successively, Supply Officer, Commanding Officer, and Officer in Charge of Field 8, 3rd A.I.C.

On September 25, Major Davis was relieved of command, being succeeded by 1st Lieut. Louis H. Kronig, A.S., who commanded until after the end of the war.

The other Squadron officers in November 1918 were:

1st Lieut. John A. Taylor, A.S., Supply Officer; 2nd Lieut. Henry A. Colver, A.S.; and 2nd Lieut. Louis a Barcelo, A.S.

Other officers who had left the unit were: Randolph G. Page, 1st Lieut.; James W. Osgood, 1st. Lieut.; Robert Austin, 1st. Lieut.

During the summer a new wooden building for the Y.M.C.A. was erected across the road from the camp.

In athletics the squadron was remarkably successful, winning the Championship of the Outlying Fields in Baseball and the Championship of the 3rd A.I.C. in Football.

While the Squadron never had the good fortune to serve on the front or even under fire it is content in the knowledge that the service it rendered in the S.O.S. was just as important as duty in the Zone of Advance. Many of the American aces were trained at the 3rd A.I.C., and finished their training at Field 8.

---

# Prepared by Lieut. George W. Sutton, Jr., Tank Corps, USA.,  
from history furnished by squadron.