

20 JANV 1919
INFORMATION SECTION
AIR SERVICE A.E.F.

HISTORY OF THE 463^{RD.} AERO SQUADRON

— Official. —

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OFFICIAL HISTORY
of the
463RD AERO SQUADRON
UNITED STATES ARMY

00026

ORGANIZATION

The personnel of the 463rd Aero Squadron was recruited at Fort Logan, Colorado, Recruit Depot, from volunteers who enlisted in the period from July 24th to August 1st, 1917. This group, to which other volunteers from time to time were added, formed the base of the present unit. They came principally from the Middle Western States and particularly from Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa. On August 3rd, 1917, the group of volunteer recruits entrained for the new Military Reservation to be known as Kelly Field, South San Antonio, and where after a long hot journey of three days and the sultry welcome of the Texas sun they arrived to meet their first real military experience. Upon detraining the recruits were marched to a quarantine camp, assailed enroute by all manners of jeers, hoots, and witticisms from other rookies, who, it was learned, had arrived a few days before. Upon reaching the quarantine camp the men were assigned to a double row of khaki tents, where they were quartered for a period of ten days pending the development of contagious diseases and where at the same time they underwent a series of inoculations against typhoid fever and smallpox.

The organization of the squadron began immediately and the unit was designated as the 51st Provisional Aero Squadron. Confirmation orders came from Headquarters a few days later making it the 51st Aero Squadron; a fledgling, but nevertheless destined to a sturdy growth and a part to play which should end only when Germany should fall and the Rhine was reached.

John Pollock, a sergeant awaiting commission, was assigned as the first Commander. The squadron after several days received its much needed equipment and with a few days drill and lectures on military courtesies began to take on the appearance of a military organization. For the first time in their lives these men from all walks of civil life realized that they were soldiers of the United States Army.

Quarantine being lifted, the squadron was removed to barracks where many more conveniences were at hand and liberty to visit San Antonio was granted. About this time, August 23rd, a telegram was received from the Chief Signal Officer designating the organization as an Aero Construction Squadron with Major Edward L. Hoffman in command.

On September 2nd Major Hoffman was relieved of command of the squadron by Captain Frank H. Maguire who initiated immediate preparations for service overseas. Transfers were many, and altho the original group remained in predominance, the organization became a unit composed of men from more than one half of the states of the Union. After a period of strenuous drill the squadron participated in a grand review, along with seven other construction squadrons, before Captain Wherle who decided that the troops were sufficiently trained and disciplined for service overseas. Consequently the eight squadrons were placed under travel orders; full equipment was drawn and everything made ready for departure. Instructions to entrain for the aviation camp at Mineola, Long Island, were received on September 15th, 1917, but unfortunately departure was delayed until three o'clock, September 17th when at last two long trains bore the eight construction squadrons and their accoutrements away from the yards of South San Antonio and launched this unit on the first phase of the long journey whose final

destination was not to be gained until seventeen months later when it camped on the heights of Coblenz overlooking the Rhine.

Our trip across the United States was made interesting by many novel events. American enthusiasm now fully awakened was evinced in a hundred ways. At Texarkana, Chattanooga, and Roanoke, we stopped to parade for the benefit of the recruiting campaign, then in full swing, and everywhere our passing was heralded with cheers and hearty wishes for our future welfare. 0027

The squadron arrived at Mineola on September 21st, 1917, and was assigned to tented quarters on Hazelhurst Field No. 2, opposite the famous Meadowbrook Polo Grounds. The three weeks occupancy of this post passed very quickly, the squadron taking advantage of every minute in preparing itself for overseas service. The day's routine was crowded with formations and drills of many kinds and with lectures on many subjects relating to the military life. A high standard of efficiency had been set for the squadron and its rapid assimilation of the new studies, its still more rapid adaptation to the camp life augured a successful unit; while the receipt of the last items of equipment including construction tools and appliances pointed to a speedy release to France.

During the brief stay at Mineola many enjoyable hours were spent with the people of Mineola, Garden City, and Hempstead. The hospitality they offered and the many courtesies they extended to the soldiers by opening their homes, providing entertainments and amusement not only helped the spirit of the times, but instilled a deep gratitude in the hearts of the men who will always hold them in the highest esteem.

On October 10th, 1917, word was passed thru the camp that the eight construction squadrons were to leave for overseas service. Every preparation for departure was made and during the afternoon of October 11th, the official order came to break camp. The packing of squadron equipment, the preparing of final reports, and various other activities that are necessary in the movement of troops lasted all that night. By noon of the following day the entire camp was ready to depart, but it was not until six o'clock that evening that the plan of procedure was made known.

Accordingly at 12:35 a.m. October 13th, 1917, the squadron left camp in heavy marching order, hiking thru the mud and darkness to Garden City, Long Island, where a troop train stood in readiness to convey them to the port of embarkation. At daybreak a ferry carried them from Long Island City to Pier 54 at the foot of Tenth Avenue, New York City where the S.S. Pannonia was awaiting to take these soldiers overseas. Behind closed doors and without any spectacular farewell or goodbye scenes, the men marched onto the boat and at 10:30 a.m. on the morning of October 13th, the transport passed the Statue of Liberty bound for France. A little way out into the ocean the vessel was incorporated into a convoy of fifteen ships, some carrying troops, others freight and supplies, accompanied by one battle cruiser which was to protect the convoy against enemy seacraft. At four o'clock in the afternoon the ships having placed themselves in proper position were soon sailing under full steam for the old world.

CROSSING THE ATLANTIC

The first ten days were uneventful and pleasant, the sea was calm, the sun shone from a beautiful blue sky dotted only with white clouds. Many pleasant hours were spent on the decks of the ship and the spirit of these new soldiers was wonderful. Even with bad food and their crowded quarters they were contented,

and soon accustomed themselves to these new conditions. In due time the men were assigned to the lifeboats and rafts, drills were organized to facilitate orderly movements, lookouts were posted, smoking was prohibited on deck, all lights were carefully screened; and as further protection, a gunner manned a six inch gun on the stern of the boat.

00028

On the evening of October 23rd, the sea began to roll considerably. There was a heavy rain and when the morning of the 24th dawned the ocean was a raging mass of water and foam. It was a storm such as the crew had not encountered in eleven years. It scattered the convoy in every direction and for twelve hours the ship was forced to turn its nose westward and head into the gale. After thirty-six hours the storm abated and the sea calmed allowing the vessel to proceed. We were now in the danger zone sailing toward the nearest port unescorted. About ten o'clock on the morning of October 27th a welcome sight greeted the ship's passengers. Two British destroyers were making for us to convoy the ship into a nearby port. At one o'clock on the same day the high hills off the northern coast of Ireland were sighted, and for the first time in fourteen days land was seen. The ship entered a little port named Lock Souilly at five o'clock that evening but remained at this place only two hours when orders to proceed onward were received. At seven o'clock the Pannonia once more started out and at six o'clock Sunday morning, October 28th, 1917, we dropped anchor in Belfast harbor. The vessel remained at that place until midnight, when the anchor was hoisted and the last lap of the voyage was made. It was a quiet uneventful trip across the Irish Sea, and by midday, October 29th, the city of Liverpool, England was sighted. At high tide the ship entered the harbor, made its way down the Mersey River and at four o'clock the same afternoon fifteen hundred men set their feet on ground for the first time in sixteen days. A train was waiting at the station to transport the troops across England and all were sent on to Camp Borden, with the exception of a detail composed of twelve men under First Lieutenant C. H. Chilson. This detail remained four weeks in Liverpool, unloading, checking, and arranging for the reshipping of the equipment of the eight construction squadrons to France.

IN ENGLAND

In the early hours of the morning of October 30th, 1917, in a pouring rain the train reached Camp Borden, where the troops were to wait for further orders.

The first air raid was experienced here on the night of October 30th, 1917, when German raiders visited London, thereby causing the alert to be sounded in the outlying districts.

On November 1st, 1917, the squadron entrained for Southampton and upon arrival embarked for Le Havre on the transport H.M.S. Viper. At Le Havre quarters were secured at a rest camp where the men were granted a day for recuperation before the monotonous and tedious journey which, however, had not dampened the spirits of the men who were buoyed up by the expectancy of the future. Four days and four nights of tiresome travel on a train of bumpy box cars brought the 51st Aero Squadron to its first post of duty in France.

THE THIRD AVIATION INSTRUCTION CENTER, FRANCE

This cantonment is situated at a distance some eight kilometers to the north of Issoudun (Indre) a city of fifteen thousand inhabitants, where LaFayette, the great French general, maintained recruiting headquarters for his American army during the war of our Revolution. The purpose of this center was to instruct and train military aviators for the front, the course being carried out in its various stages in eight separate fields centering about the main camp. A hangar was assigned as quarters for the squadron and here the men endured many hardships due to insufficient housing, very inadequate facilities for drying their clothes, which were

always water soaked from the incessant rains and lack of proper foot wear. Construction work began at once. At that time only a few barracks and hangars had been erected, a mere skeleton of what was to follow. At first the entire squadron was detailed for road operations at which it continued, to a greater or less extent while at this station. As time went on details were placed on various phases of the work, such as barracks, electrical, water works, narrow gauge railway, and structural steel construction. Several sergeants were placed in charge of groups of German prisoners, while six chauffeurs were temporarily transferred to the transportation service. In four months time, against terrific odds in the way of adverse weather conditions under which the men were obliged to work at all times, insufficient equipment for construction work, and lack of organization, a small city with a water system supplied by water tower one hundred feet in height, to which were connected several sub-reservoirs; an electric light plant, paved streets, two spacious Y.M.C.A. huts, and a commodious Red Cross establishment, a hospital, Quartermaster depot, machine shops, barracks, and hangars had been constructed in one of the muddiest holes in France. The largest and most important enterprises attempted by the squadron were the erection and completion of both the hospital and Red Cross units for which the organization received much praise and approbation from the officers in charge of the field. Assistance was also lent to other organization engaged in the construction of hangars, Y.M.C.A. huts, and machine shops; while a picked detail established an unequalled record in the erection of portable barracks. 29

After six weeks of existence in the hangars the squadron was moved to much more comfortable quarters in barracks. If the inclement conditions under which the men were obliged to live are given consideration it was indeed surprising that serious illness did not prevail to a greater extent. However, a strict quarantine was maintained at all times which accounts for the fact that no dangerous contagious disease became epidemic, excepting the prevalence of measles and mumps. About this time, in accordance with the reorganization of the Air Service, the squadron was designated as the 463rd Aero Squadron.

It was at this post that the first Christmas in France was spent and it will always be remembered. Most of the men received Christmas packages from home, and the Y.M.C.A. and Red Cross brought cheer into the camp by distributing a Christmas box to every man, and a victrola to every squadron.

Football teams were organized and many interesting contests were enjoyed on Sundays and holidays.

The surrounding country was filled with many places of interest from a historical standpoint, all of which the men were able to see before leaving.

The squadron suffered the loss of one man while at the Third Aviation Instruction Center, Sergeant First Class Welby N. Crang, from Clinton, Illinois. He died December 28th, 1917 of pneumonia contracted while engaged in work on the post. He was a man of fine character and his loss was keenly felt by all the men of the squadron. On December 31st, he was buried with full military honors at the post cemetery.

By the first of February construction work at this post was fast coming to a close and it was made known that the construction squadrons would soon be leaving to perform similar duties at other posts in France.

On February 23rd, 1918 this organization received orders to proceed to Colombey-les-Belles (Meurthe-et-Moselle) at which place the First Air Depot was to be constructed. It was in the Zone of Advance and near the front, so orders to

move to such a location were received with no little excitement, and with much satisfaction by every man of the squadron. At six o'clock in the morning of February 24th, after having spent the entire night in packing, the squadron entrained at the post depot and by 7:30 a.m. were on their way north. It required two days and nights to complete the journey and at 6 o'clock on a cold, raw morning, the squadron detrained at the little town of Barisey-la-Cote, which was about one kilometer from the new post. After a breakfast of hot coffee and bread the men marched down the road to their new station, the first Aero Squadron of its kind to come into the Zone of Advance.

THE FIRST AIR DEPOT

00030

This post had already been organized and a few barracks erected, but it was only a start on the proposed project so a big task was in store for this construction squadron. Twenty-four^{hours} were allotted for the men to get settled and the day after our arrival operations began. A crushed stone road leading from a main highway into and thru the camp was started. Barracks, shops, and bombproofs were a part of the program and these were all under way in a short time. During the first three weeks incessant rains and considerable snow handicapped the work to some extent; but very little time was lost, and in four weeks much had been accomplished. One kilometer of crushed stone road, wide enough for two vehicles to pass, had been built, five barracks, two shops and warehouses, and six Swiss huts were erected. A detail of six men also received their first lessons in the art of camouflaging, which experience proved of great value.

By the middle of April a sufficient number of barracks to house the much needed mechanical and clerical personnel, shops for the aeroplane work were ready so once more the squadron awaited orders to proceed to a new project.

While at the First Air Depot Captain Frank H. Maguire rejoined the squadron thereby assuming command and relieving First Lieutenant C. H. Chilson, but owing to orders placing him on detached service at another post he was with the organization only a few days.

On April 15th orders from Advance Section, Air Service ordered the squadron to a new station. Five trucks, a motorcycle, and a Fiat touring car were added to our equipment. With these and a complete set of construction tools, which had been received while at the First Air Depot, the unit proceeded to its new station.

COLOMBEY AIRDROME

This post was located one kilometer east of Colombey-les-Belles, and two kilometers from the First Air Depot. It was an entirely new proposition and the squadron operating by itself for the first time was to build a flying field on two hundred acres of French farm land, and to erect barracks, shops, and hangars necessary for the operations of four Bombing Squadrons.

Owing to weather conditions which were particularly bad at that time of the year, it was impossible to do any work on the field, so the entire squadron began constructing barracks. They were to be built in a piece of woods just across from the flying field. They were placed in rows of five, with one hundred feet between each, and also irregular as to placing. The roofs were covered with evergreen boughs and this, together with the irregular alignment and natural forest, made an exceptionally well camouflaged camp.

By May 1st weather conditions changed which permitted work on the flying field to begin. To put this field into good condition it was necessary to plow, harrow, drag, roll, and seed the entire ground. Three tractors, two 4-share plows, two disc harrows, and six rollers became a part of our equipment, all being used in the construction of the field, and twenty horses from a veterinary hospital at Neufchateau were also used in this work. A detail of thirty-five men with all this equipment worked night and day for seven weeks preparing this flying field. It was no small task. There were many hollows and small ditches to be filled in; there were many ridges and knowles to be cut down, all of which required much hard work, ingenuity, and interest in the part of men assigned to this work. When the machinery became broken the men of this detail repaired it, various pieces of farm machinery were actually made and put into use by these men. 103

The hauling of material, supplies, and equipment necessitated more transportation which after much effort was obtained. Ten 3-ton Liberty trucks were added to the squadron transportation. The organization now had a total of nineteen pieces of transportation thus making it a very mobile unit, and with this and all our equipment the squadron could successfully handle any piece of construction work laid out for it.

By the first of July this Airdrome was in a completed state. In the little forest above mentioned twenty-five barracks and mess halls with a dozen Nissen huts scattered between them had been erected. A field of about two hundred and fifty acres had been plowed, harrowed, rolled, and seeded with five tons of grass seed. Along one side of the field and in the edge of the forest twelve hangar sites had been cleared. Fifteen hundred feet of crushed rock road was also built thru the camp and many small stone and cinder paths connected the buildings. A stone parking space one hundred by two hundred fifty feet from which a road lead to a machine shop was also part of the project. (See map Colombey Airdrome).

Outside of regular duty many enjoyable hours were spent both by the men and officers while at this post. Base ball games were frequent, games being played with other squadrons both at our field and at other posts. The fourth of July was celebrated in such a way as never to be forgotten. Athletic contests were indulged in during the morning and at noon the men and officers met together out in the open under cover of the open forest where they enjoyed their fourth of July dinner.

There are two other incidents deserving mention which occurred while the squadron was operating at this place. One was the installation of a Y.M.C.A. with Reverend George D. Egbert of Flushing, New York as its secretary. He came during the week operations at this post started and remained until the squadron left in July. Doctor Egbert in his connection with the organization thru this medium proved a great asset. He was a hard and faithful worker. He established a night school for the men, provided entertainment, and did everything in his power to make the mens leisure hours pleasant and profitable. His leaving the squadron to return to the United States was keenly felt by all.

The arrival of the 103rd Labor Company was another incident which cannot be overlooked. The company composed of two hundred Morococons, dressed in their native attire, with Second Lieutenant William H. Parr, a veteran of this war as their Commanding Officer, was witnessed with much curiosity. They, however, proved to be good workers and in the building of the roads and performing other labor duties that require little skill rendered valuable assistance in expediting the work.

While at this post Second Lieutenant Arthur H. Hoddick who had been with the squadron since January 14th, 1918, was transferred to the First Air Depot as Post Adjutant. 0003

First Lieutenants L. L. Holmes, J. K. Willcox, W. W. Bryne, and Second Lieutenant Henry G. Wilson were attached to the squadron at this post, but owing to the demand for officers on other projects the last-named were sent to other posts upon the completion of the Colombey Airdrome. Captain F. H. Maguire also returned and assumed the duties as Commanding Officer of the squadron relieving First Lieutenant C. H. Chilson.

During the last three weeks at this place many restless nights were spent due to the air raids carried on by the Germans. They were a nightly occurrence but two large bombproof shelters capable of holding a hundred men each offered ample protection and fortunately no one was injured.

On July 16th this Air Field being ready for occupancy the squadron received orders to proceed to St. Blin (Haute-Marne).

ST. BLIN AIR FIELD

This location was on the main road between Neufchateau and Chaumont about three kilometers from the town of St. Blin. (See map number two). It comprised three hundred fifty acres of land about half of which was under cultivation with grain and potatoes, three thousand bushels of the latter being dug and delivered to the Quartermaster, United States Army.

Six tractors, two gang plows, six disc harrows, four large rollers, and thirty-five horses were used in the preparation of this field. No buildings were to be constructed until late in the fall at this field so the entire squadron was engaged in field work. With all the machinery and man power this field neared completion in a months time. Consequently the squadron was divided into three details, one moving to field near the town of Martigny on the main road between Colombey-les-Belles and Neufchateau, the other to a field one kilometer west of the main St. Blin field. (See maps numbers 3 and 4). These new projects were just started when the squadron received orders that it had been transferred into the First Army and was to operate for an indefinite time with the VIII French Army. On August 26th these unfinished projects were abandoned and the 463rd Aero Squadron moved to Colombey-les-Belles. The organization remained here for a week doing a little repair work on the field and on Sunday, September 1st, 1918 a French Army Truck Train transported the squadron to its new location.

While at the St. Blin Air Field Captain F. H. Maguire was relieved from duty with this squadron and ordered to Rome, Italy, his successor being First Lieutenant J. K. Willcox who assumed command August 1st, 1918.

THE LA NEUVEVILLE AIR FIELD

This was a French flying field which had been under construction by their engineers for quite sometime, but as it was necessary to expedite the work so that French squadrons could operate in that sector the 463rd Aero Squadron was called upon to assist them. This airdrome was located in the Luneville sector, about fifteen kilometers south of Nancy and four kilometers north and west of Bayon, (Meurthe-et-Moselle). While here seven Bessonneau hangars, twenty by twenty-eight meters were erected, twelve E.M.C. barracks were constructed. These buildings were six by thirty by six meters, built partially of a composition brick

and finished with lumber. A detail of thirty-five men was also sent from this place to an aviation field near Pont St. Vincent to erect hangars. This detail operating under First Lieutenant Holmes constructed three Bessonneaus in three days. 033

At La Neuveville the famous French flier, Lieutenant Fonck and his escadrille operated for a few days, but frequent raids by the enemy caused them to move to another front.

Lieutenant J. K. Willcox was relieved from duty with the squadron while at this post and Lieutenant C. H. Chilson, by virtue of rank, assumed command.

The middle of September found the U. S. Army, we thot, with all the great part of its preparatory work done and ready to prosecute a long continuous and offensive war. We had participated in the construction and organization of the Air Service thruout its activity for this end. From the great training centers in central France to the advanced bases in the Zone of Advance we have assisted in creating that establishment which should permit a thoro functioning of the great machine on the very firing line.

We were now to have the opportunity to assist in the advance itself. By verbal orders Headquarters First American Army, September 26th, 1918, we were relieved from detached duty with the VIII French Army and ordered to proceed to Bethelainville (nine kilometers northwest of Verdun), to erect an advanced flying field. It was a significant date and a significant place. On that date the First American Army launched its culminating offensive and on that date the advance in the Third Corps Zone began from the woods which bordered our field. We broke camp without a moments delay happy in the prospect that, as combat troops First Army, our new position would mark the apex of the Air Service's activity and that to us had come the honor to prepare the way for the service squadrons to follow. The roads approaching our destination were blocked with a hurrying traffic of many commands all intensely struggling to complete their missions with the utmost dispatch. Our progress was, however, highly successful and at dusk on October 28th, 1918, our trucks came to a stop where temporary shelters were to be thrown up in the edge of the forest. One distressing incident of the movement was the accident sustained by our respected Comrade Sergeant First Class Oney W. Lumpkin 25444, whose intelligence, mechanical skill, and character had contributed much to the efficiency of our organization. 41?

He had been riding on the side of a truck trailer with his legs hanging over the side of the platform. A short distance north of Souilly the driver swung to the right to allow another truck to pass. In so doing the trailer was thrown against a tree catching Sergeant Lumpkin's left leg. The pressure was so great that he was pulled along the trailer's edge curshing the bones and knee joint in a frightful manner. He was hurried to a hospital and received good care but it became necessary to amputate the limb above the knee joint.

In the dusk of our first day at Bethelainville we made a hurried survey of our position and the field. We were on top of the hill west of the village and west of the field lay a considerable piece of timber, a rendezvous of French tanks and reserve American Infantry. From the eminence we commanded a fine view of the immediate operations. We were ahead of our own heavy artillery. East of us along the Meuse, southeast of us toward Verdun, north and west and south and west in the Argonne there was the continual flash and roar of thickly set artillery. The field was shell torn and traversed in several directions with wire entanglements and abandoned trench lines. We were one thousand feet from a hard road and three or

four kilometers from a main highway. We knew that with the long hill and the heavy materiel which must be hauled the rain of the season would be a difficult obstacle. We knew also that supplies and building material would at this advanced point be difficult to obtain, nevertheless we set to work immediately to establish a record for construction.

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Our personnel was augmented here by First Lieutenant Earle W. Moss, whose assistance to Captain Chilson as squadron adjutant and supply officer, summary court, and judge advocate of the post special court filled a long felt want in the organization, and despite the long hauls from the most remote sources, supplies were forthcoming, leaving Lieutenant Moss and Captain Chilson free to rush, with their customary dispatch, the work thru to completion. By the end of the 26th day of October, we had cleared brush and timber and erected twentyone, thirty-meter barracks, seven large Bessonneau hangars, nineteen individual hangars, and had built twelve hundred feet of crushed stone road with additional rock parking space two hundred feet square.

Thruout this period we had almost continuous rainfall or dark cloudy days. The squadron with the most admirable spirit had, however, attacked the work with a resolute determination to see it thru with the greatest possible speed. From before dawn to after dark, day in and day out, the work went forward. After ample hangar space had been provided, we had in addition to the above, been able to construct more than a kilometer of Decauville track for facilitating the movement of supplies. We look back upon this, our period of greatest activity, with much pride. The Bethelainville Airdrome was built on "No Man's Land"(See map number 5). The field had to be plowed, dragged, and graded in many places. It was necessary to clear brush and timber ground for the barracks. It was a period of continual artillery action and nightly air raids, hence all structures had to be completely camouflaged. Our own canvass shelters were well pitched, yet the continual rain with the heavy mud of the French autumn made it impossible to keep dry and warm. Yet despite the obstacles, with apparently impossible living conditions, we were able on the 26th of October to surprise the higher command by reporting that the field was ready for operation, and would accomodate one thousand men and sixty aeroplanes.

Our labor had not been in vain or gone without appreciation for soon recognition came thru First Army General Orders with read as follows:

OFFICE
FIRST ARMY AIR SERVICE COMMANDER
AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES

France, 21st November 1918.

GENERAL ORDERS)
NUMBER 29.)

EXTRACT

X X X X X

The Army Air Service Commander, First Army, desires to make of record in General Orders of the First Army Air Service his extreme satisfaction with the conduct of the officers and soldiers of the following units:

5. 463rd. Aero Construction Squadron, during the advance of our troops

in the St. Mihiel and Argonne - Meuse offensives, constructed five airdromes on the retaken territory with such alacrity as to enable our flying squadrons to carry on operations without delay.

0035

X

X

X

X

X

By order of Colonel Milling:

W. C. Sherman
Lt-Col., C.S., USA.
Chief of Staff.

OFFICIAL

H. S. Sturgis,
1st Lt. A.S., USA.
Adjutant.

The 88th and 90th Aero Squadrons were the first to arrive, and with their arrival we made a half holiday to rest from the strain of the arduous and sleepless nights. This half holiday had its ludicrous side for it turned out to be a squadron washing day. Every bush was a clothes rack, the barber broke all records for cutting hair, and the squadron bathed.

Many incidents occurred in this field trivial in their nature, yet sacred in the memory of the men of the organization. Incidents, which while they were web and woof of days happy to look back upon, cannot be incorporated in this sketch. Comment on a few only can be inserted. The puzzle we had in securing and bringing to the field three heavy tractors and a 4-ton grader; our chagrin, when while smoothing the field, we awoke to find three new shell holes, the harvest of German sowing of the night before; our experience of hand grenades in a bush; the many aerial battles fought in our vicinity; the observation balloons of friends and foe shot down within our vision; the night raiders which the attending searchlights chased; the evenings with sky aglow with cannon flashes, rockets, signal lights, and the shifting beams of many searchlights; Captain Chilson's trip to Souilly and his eventful return after being lost in a traffic jam that carried him into the lines near Verdun; the excursion of Lieutenant Moss and Chauffeur Smith across "No Man's Land" in the motorcycle and the breakdown north of Esne in the middle of the night on the return trip; and many similar episodes from this fabric.

One important day approached which the squadron was solicitous to celebrate with a fitting ceremony. This was the anniversary of our arrival in France, October 29th, 1917. Although it was very difficult to plan, we decided upon giving a banquet even though it must be eaten in an unfinished barrack with two or three inches of mud on the floor. Lieutenant Moss set off to Bar-le-Duc and finally arranged with the Y.M.C.A. for suitable entertainment. Additional food was obtained also, and after many supply trips sufficient small quantities of candy and chocolate was stored up to insure every man a feast. At last the day came and about noon the warm sun hidden for days, broke thru the clouds and turned our dreary post into a pleasant woodland. About 3 p.m. an exciting aerial battle took place over the camp and then our entertainers came. They were Mrs.

Gould of New York City, Miss Watkins of Burton, California, Mr. Spaulding of New York City, and Mr. Walter of Minneapolis, Minnesota. We had feared that it would be impossible for them to reach us, hence their arrival was greeted with much enthusiasm and we all eagerly awaited the mess call. Greatly to the credit and resources of Mr. Spaulding we learned that a nearby ammunition ⁰³⁶ had captured a plane from a German dugout and was transporting it back to Souilly. He set off with the truck in pursuit and soon with the detail returned with the instrument loaned for the night, thus he accomplished what appeared the impossible and earned the gratitude of us all. Sergeant Mendell and his cooks had outdone themselves in the preparation of the banquet and altho twice it became necessary to extinguish all the lights owing to air raids we all had a royal feed after which Captain Chilson reviewed the work of the squadron for the year and short speeches were heard from Lieutenant Moss, Lieutenant Burnham, and our guests. After the banquet we went to another barrack where we listened to the music and songs of the "Y". They were well sung and with such an apparent sincerity and spontaneity that one must have sought long to find the same pleasing atmosphere in the concerts or theaters of New York City. The evening was a fitting climax to the year of hard work and difficult places and too long hours.

The lines had begun to recede rapidly from us, and the Bethelainville Airdrome habitable, we knew that we should move on ahead to build another field. Anxious to go thru to the Rhine and hold our place as advance party of the Air Service, we awaited with impatience our orders. They did not come, however, until Austria had signed the armistice and Germany was staggering her way to the Rhine. On the 9th of November we began to move for the Exermont field, a long trip of sixty kilometers over roads rutted by artillery and broken by shell holes. We had only partially established our camp when other orders were received to continue on to the Barricourt field near Stenay. So bringing up the last load from Bethelainville we relayed on to Barricourt, using Exermont as a halfway station.

The armistice with Germany was signed and hostilities were ordered to cease at 11 a.m. November 11th, while we were on the road. We received official confirmation on the 12th, just as our advanced detachment reached Barricourt.

Our history to the cessation of hostilities therefore ends at Barricourt field, an abandoned German air field, the first to be occupied by the American Air Service. By strange coincidence we found the ridge to the south of it to be the last assigned objective of the corps that had passed thru. From there on resistance had ceased. Hence our way in the Argonne - Meuse offensive began at the line of the "step off" and ended on the last field of battle for the zone we occupied.

In concluding this history it is only fitting to say that the squadron composed of a body of high class men gave the best they had in them for the cause for which they enlisted. They were conscientious and willing and did all in their power to prove themselves an asset to the service. No matter what was to be accomplished the men always accepted the task with a spirit of willingness which was kept up to the end. This, together with the quality of work and the results produced by the squadron, has made it an organization worthy of notice.

C. H. Chilson
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Captain, Air Service,
Commanding.