

## 477th AERO SQUADRON (CONSTRUCTION)

On August 11, 1917, a trainload of recruits from Fort Slocum, New York, arrived at Kelly Field, South San Antonio, Texas and were divided into sections of one hundred and fifty men each and quartered in tents on the lower field. On the 12th, the 65th Aero Squadron was organized with twenty acting non-commissioned officers under the supervision of M. S. E. Thomas Boland, S. C. From August 25, to September 19th, 2nd Lieut. John E. Steinbrenner, Inf. had charge of the squadron.

On September 5, it was designated as a Construction Squadron. On the 19th, 1st Lieut. Brady W. Warner A. S., S. O. R. C., took command. He was relieved by 1st Lieut. Hayward H. Kendall, A. S., S. O. R. C. on October 4, who was in turn relieved by 1st Lieut. William G. Perry, A. S., S. O. R. C. on November 13.

Up to this time the squadron had been doing camp fatigue with guard every other day, but on November 26, it was detailed for duty with the Stone and Webster Construction Company. Work consisted in digging a ditch across the field for telephone wires. Other active construction work at the field consisted in digging one hundred latrines, a feat that was accomplished in record time.

The squadron left Kelly Field for the Aviation Concentration Camp at Morrison, Virginia, on January 26, and arrived there on January 30, 1918. Here the number was changed from 65 to 477 of February 1.

At Newport News, Virginia, the squadron embarked March 4 on board the U.S.S. Madawaska, with nine other construction squadrons. They landed at St. Nazaire on March 21, and on the 24th entrained for the 1st Air Depot at Colombey-les-Belles, arriving there on the 27th. On March 28th, the 477th squadron with the 482nd moved to Autreville (Vosges) for the construction of the Autreville Airdrome.

In spite of the rainy weather and consequent mud, the squadrons made excellent progress. Work with tractors and machinery was carried out continuously in eight hour shifts. No lights were permitted except for repairs and for working in the fog. The largest job in the making of this airdrome was in putting a mile of Macadam road through a forest and the levelling of a very rough site for a flying field. Sites were cleared and graded and about one half the buildings for this airdrome erected by June 10, when the 477th was ordered to Amanty (Meuse).

They moved there on June 12, and although this airdrome had been in use for several months, considerable construction work was necessary to complete the project as outlined. Hangars located in open fields were taken down and erected in the woods for camouflage. Barracks were moved, arrangement of buildings re-adjusted, and much essential work done to make the field a safe place to land.

This field work was done while the airdrome was being used. Tractors and trucks were used on plows, harrows graders, drags and rollers, and the work continued for about five weeks in two eight hour shifts from four A.M. to eight P.M. Previous to the time when this squadron

began work at Amanty an average of one plane a day wrecked in landing, usually due to the condition of the field, while within one week after the arrival of the 477th squadron, the field was greatly improved and since then not one plane is known to have wrecked on account of a rough field.

While the squadron was located at Amanty, a site for another field at Badonvillers was selected and from August 1 to the 22nd, most of the field equipment was used in grading and levelling this field.

On August 22nd orders were received transferring the 477th squadron to the First Army and to move to Biq-uley (Meurthe-et-Moselle), to construct a secret airdrome within a given time. The squadron moved on the 23d and by the 30th had the original project, for which nine days had been allowed, completed in seven. This was accomplished by working 16 hours a day. The Airdrome was visited by Colonel Mitchell, C.A.S., 1st Army two days later, and he complimented both the squadron commander and the men on their efforts. Additional hangars, barracks, etc. were added to the project at this field and the squadron worked here until the St. Mihiel drive, when on September 14, orders were received to move to St. Mihiel.

The squadron moved on September 15 and constructed an airdrome just to the northeast of the town of St. Mihiel, on an old cavalry drill ground. The first ten days in this field were instructive to a non-combatant unit, in that the town of St. Mihiel, with all adjacent roads and woods were the objectives of enemy bombing and machine-gun strafing on each clear night.

More than half of the material used in buildings for this airdrome was salvaged from German depots. On October 15th, Squadron Commander 1st Lieut. William G. Perry was made equipment officer of the first army and 1st Lieut. Nolan D. Mitchell succeeded him as commanding officer.

On Oct. 17th, the squadron moved to Sivry-la-Perche to construct an airdrome on a good site, but which was at that time pretty well covered with barbed wire entanglements and trenches. A usable field was made here in a week but most of the squadron worked dismantling barracks and hangars at Rumont and transporting and erecting them at Julvecourt and Bethlainville.

On Nov. 8th, the squadron moved to Landreville (Ardennes) to renovate and reconstruct an old enemy field. Shell holes were filled, the field levelled, one hangar erected, two others delivered on the ground, and several old buildings made habitable. Work was continued here even after the signing of the armistice to Nov. 16th, to insure a usable field.

On November twenty-third orders were received dated November twentieth, transferring the 477th squadron from the First Army to Advance Section, S.O.S., with instructions to proceed to First Air Depot, Colombey-les-Belles, and from thence to Brest, for embarkation to the United States. The squadron moved overland on the 24th and 25th to First Air Depot.

On its being relieved from duty with the First Army the following citation was given:

OFFICE

FIRST ARMY AIR SERVICE COMMANDER  
AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES.

France, 21st November, 1918

General Orders)  
Number 29 )

Extract.

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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:

2. 477th Aero Construction Squadron, in addition to their excellent services in the construction of five Airdromes in the territory taken during the St. Mihiel and Argonne-Meuse attacks, established a record for speed and efficiency by building an airdrome of ten hangars and fifteen barracks in ten days.

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By order of Colonel Milling:

W. C. Sherman,

Lt. -Col., G. S., U. S. A.,  
Chief of Staff.

Official:

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

Original signed  
Edited Information Section, Air Service, Dec. 17, 1918.