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**OUR ARMY AIR CORPS AND ITS FUTURE**  
By Major General Henry H. Arnold, Air Corps  
Chief of the Air Corps

On August 2, 1909, the Chief Signal Officer of the Army approved the findings of a Board of Officers of the Army Signal Corps, recommending the acceptance of the Army's first airplane.

A goodly number of the oldtimers of that day are still living, but it is with a tinge of sadness that I think of your friend and mine, Colonel Charles deF. Chandler, who passed away on May 17, 1939. Colonel Chandler, then a Captain, was a member of that Board and was intimately connected with Army aviation from that day until his death. Since his retirement in 1920, he has made his home in Washington, and he has helped all of us with his counsel and his historical knowledge.

Since the acceptance of that first flying-machine for our Army - and for any army for that matter - we have been going constantly forward. I feel that I can speak with some authority on this subject, not only because of my position as Chief of the Air Corps, but because I am one of that generation of oldtimers who learned to fly during the first couple of years following the purchase of that first plane. This is by no means a historical narrative, nor is it a chronology of happenings during these thirty years, but I cannot help looking back a bit wistfully before contemplating the future.

A question which has often been asked me is: "Who was the first Army officer to fly alone in an airplane?" Some know, but most people do not. It was First Lieutenant Thomas E. Selfridge, Field Artillery, U. S. Army, in whose memory Selfridge Field, Mt. Clemens, Mich., was named. While the Wright Brothers, Wilbur and Orville, were demonstrating their plane at Fort Myer, Virginia, in 1908, and giving flying instruction to several officers, Lieut. Selfridge flew alone on August 2, 1908, for one minute and 30 seconds. This happened exactly one year before the recommendation was approved for the purchase of the Army's first airplane. Moreover, this was before any army or any military force in the world had a plane. Everyone was saddened by the death of Lieut. Selfridge which occurred on September 17, 1908. He was making a flight with Orville Wright when a brace wire snapped, causing the breakage of one of the propellers and the machine to crash. Selfridge was killed and Mr. Wright was severely injured.

But after we received our first plane, a Wright, on August 2, 1909, who was the first Army man to solo it? The honor was equally divided between two lieutenants of the Regular Army -

Frederick E. Humphries and Frank P. Lahm. The former is now a Colonel of the New York National Guard and the latter is a Colonel in the Air Corps, Regular Army. Colonel Lahm has the distinction of being the first Commanding General of the Air Corps Training Center, and during his tenure of this position for a period of four years from July 17, 1926, he held the rank of Brigadier General.

On October 26, 1909, Humphries made a solo flight of three minutes, followed immediately by Lahm, who also flew alone for thirteen minutes. On that same day at our Flying School at College Park, Md., each of these officers made two more solo flights. That proved that they were deserving of the honor, for at the end of the day the flying-machine was undamaged. Another officer who soloed shortly thereafter was Lieut. Benjamin D. Foulois, who later served with distinction as Chief of the Air Corps with the rank of Major General. Colonel Roy C. Kirtland, then one of the senior officers of that group of early flyers, commanded the College Park School, and only recently - in May 1939 - was retired from active service. Lieut. Colonel Stephen J. Idzorek, Air Corps, who is to retire from active service this summer, was one of our noncommissioned officers of those days, as was Lieut. Colonel Vernon L. Burge. Colonel Thomas DeWitt Milling, who retired in July, 1933, was one of the charter members of the "Early Birds." He is affectionately known as "Tommy" by his host of friends. He and I learned to fly together at the Wright Brothers School at Dayton, Ohio, in 1911.

From my memory and personal notes, the following officers and enlisted men, aside from those previously mentioned, performed solo flights in the order in which their names are mentioned:

Lieut. Frank M. Kennedy, Corporal Vernon L. Burge, Lieuts. Lewis H. Brereton, Herbert A. Dargue, Sergeant William C. Ocker, Lieuts. Byron Q. Jones, Douglas B. Netherwood, Walter G. Kilner, Shepler W. Fitzgerald, Henry W. Harms, Ira A. Rader, Harrison H. C. Richards, John F. Curry and Ralph Royce. Of these early flyers, the then Lieuts. Dargue and Kilner now hold the rank of Brigadier General in the Air Corps, while the remainder hold either the rank of Colonel or Lieut. Colonel.

One writing a sketch of Army Aviation from its very inception would be guilty of a grave omission were he to neglect to mention the name of one individual who literally grew up with this branch of the service. He is Mr. John J.

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Mullaney, who has been Chief Clerk of the Air Corps since it started out on its own - when it was separated from the Signal Corps. Mr. Mullaney began his service with the War Department back in 1905 in the Office of the Chief Signal Officer of the Army, and when the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps was established he was assigned to duty in that Section and has been "in" on every event that transpired in Army aviation ever since. During the time the first Army airplane was under consideration he wrote part of the contract entered into with the Wright Brothers.

The first annual appropriation to be made for military aviation was not provided until 1911. The amount of \$125,000 set aside for this purpose was then considered quite large. In connection with this, it must be remembered that in 1898 the Board of Ordnance and Fortifications contributed two amounts of \$25,000 each to Professor Langley for his flying experiments. And, of course, there was specifically made available the sum of \$25,000, plus a bonus of \$5,000, to pay the Wright Brothers for our first airplane.

The Aviation Section of the Signal Corps was not created until July 18, 1914. By April 6, 1917, on which day we entered the World War, Army aviation consisted of 65 officers (of whom only 35 were pilots), less than 1100 men and 55 planes.

The story of the war flying has been told adequately by others many times. There were brilliant successes. Our officers and men were second to none in the world in courage and ability. At first we had to use European airplanes for our flyers. Our industry, however, did promptly and efficiently produce the Liberty engine, and it was a good one for these days. Contracts for 5,000 DeHavillands were let in September, 1917, and, with all available manufacturers working at top speed, they together turned out only 155 by May, 1918, - a period of eight months. On that date, 49 of these had been shipped overseas.

The recital of these statistics is rather dry reading, to be sure, but the lesson which we draw from them certainly gives us a jolt - or it should. It shows us that we were unprepared to produce aviation equipment. The production figure of but 155 airplanes in a period of eight months shows that we were unprepared to produce aviation equipment, despite unlimited funds and the most frenzied efforts.

In man power we had mushroomed to 18,000 officers and 135,000 enlisted men at the time of the Armistice. This strength was rapidly reduced to about 1,000 officers and 10,000 men on June 30, 1921, and August 21, 1920, respect-

ively.

When that memorable day - November 11, 1918 - arrived, the Allies dictated the terms, but the number of American-built planes sent to the front had little to do with the favorable result. We were unprepared, and no amount of money or effort could produce good equipment in a short time.

The Congress has just followed the wisdom of the President's recommendations of January 12th, last. Among other things, the Commander-in-Chief said:

"Military aviation is increasing today at an unprecedented and alarming rate. Increased range, increased speed, increased capacity of airplanes abroad have changed our requirements for defense aviation."

Just what will that mean to National Defense, insofar as the Air Corps is concerned, within, say, a couple of years? We have been provided a supplemental appropriation of \$300,000,000. In our program of expansion we considered not only the necessary number of airplanes but also the other phases which will give a well rounded plan. What are they? In addition to planes, we must have pilots and combat crews to operate them, mechanics to maintain them, and air bases with suitable buildings and equipment with which and from which to conduct flying operations.

It is expected that our present airplane strength will be increased to a minimum of 5,500. The actual number will depend on the proportion of the different types procured. About 3300 of these will be active planes, and 2,000 of them will be combat types. The aircraft industry has gladly accepted the job of producing them. We think that many of the types will be the best in the world. But our future superiority which we have or may secure will be largely due to the provision of funds for experimental work. We have \$10,000,000 for all experimental development purposes for this fiscal year.

Our main task, then, is to secure and train the necessary personnel, both officers and enlisted men. Our officer personnel of the Regular Army will be increased about 90% in the next ten years. Our enlisted personnel will be increased through increments prior to July 1, 1940, to 45,000. This year we shall commission about 400 officers from qualified Air Corps Reservists. In the next nine years, about 130 per year plus those required for attrition, will be added. Reserve pilots will be ordered to active duty to fulfill our requirements. At first there will be more Reserves than Regulars, but later the proportions will be reversed.

Randolph and Kelly Fields do not have the capacity for the necessary increase.

(Continued on Page 36)

Our Army Air Corps and Its Future  
(Continued from Page 4)

in the training program. A plan was therefore evolved for giving primary training at qualified civilian flying schools. This primary training will consume three months. The students who successfully complete this course will then be transferred to Randolph Field for basic training of three months' duration. The last three months of the nine months' course will consist of advanced training at Kelly Field, following which the coveted wings will be presented to the graduates. Specialized training will then be given to these new flyers in the various tactical organizations to which they will be assigned. While the course has been reduced from one year to nine months, the same high standards will be maintained. Only the number of hours of certain phases of the course will be cut down, and it will be the function of our tactical units to complete the specialized training. The civilian schools selected for primary instruction purposes are excellent, and their instructors are entirely competent.

By June 30, 1940, we shall have enlisted an additional 25,000 men. We shall give two-thirds of them specialized training. Another branch of the Air Corps Technical School is being established at Scott Field, Ill., where a basic course will be given these men prior to their pursuing more advanced courses at Chanute and Lowry Fields.

As personnel and new airplanes become available, we shall form new tactical units. Approximately fifty new squadrons of all types will be organized during the expansion, at the conclusion of which we shall have a total of 13 Bombardment Groups of the heavy, medium and attack types, and 9 Pursuit Groups of the single-engine, interceptor and fighter types.

It is impracticable to operate all the additional new planes from our bases now in existence. We therefore plan to construct five new bases for this purpose, located as follows: one each in Alaska, Northeast United States, Southeast United States, Puerto Rico and Panama.

It is quite obvious that the average citizen is convinced that the terms "Air Power" and "Air Force" refer to conditions which now obtain throughout the world. It is our solemn trust to see to it that the training of individuals and units will insure a high state of air discipline and efficiency. Our new officers, Regular and Reserve, joining from the Training Center, must complete their training in our tactical

units so that they will be absorbed smoothly into these units, each performing his part competently and industriously. We must not permit deficiencies in training to mislead us as to the efficacy of air power and the accomplishments of air forces.

We have come a long way during the past thirty years. Who ever thought: the early days that fighting planes would fly at 500 miles an hour; that Bombers would weigh thirty tons and carry five tons of bombs for eight thousand miles; that single engines would develop two thousand horsepower or that aerial cameras could make clear photographs through layers of clouds; or that instruments could be developed making possible accurate area bombardment on localities obscured by clouds or fog; that combat crews could ride in airplanes in the substratosphere, sealed in pressure cabins with the warmth, comfort and oxygen and pressure equivalent to earth level temperature? Yet all these things, through the nighmarish fantasies of yesterday, are the successful experiments of today and will be the mass production actualities of tomorrow.

The Air Program of our Commander-in-Chief will be brought to a successful conclusion, and this will mean that we have made the first stalwart step in providing a reasonable air defense for our country.

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OUR COVER PAGE

The artistic and very attractive cover page featuring this commemorative issue of the News Letter was designed and drawn by Mr. Frank Dunnington, draftsman of the Air Corps Information Division. Mr. Dunnington has drawn many News Letter cover designs in the past, but it is believed his latest effort tops them all.

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