

THE NATIONAL GUARD AIR SERVICE

Two years ago, when he reported for duty with the Tennessee National Guard Air Service, writes Lieut. Vincent J. Meloy, Air Service, he was an unwelcome visitor in the eyes of wives, mothers, et al of the officers' families, because they firmly believed that flying was the most hazardous adventure possible. Today their attitude has changed entirely, and without exception they are now listed among the boosters. Furthermore, city and county officials and prominent business men of Nashville gradually became sold on the Air Service and joined the booster list. All this is due to the

fact that the Guard unit actually has planes, pilots and enlisted men and can make the best of nearly every opportunity offered to put the Air Service before the public.

Lieut. Meloy believes that the National Guard Air Service affords one of the best mediums possible for selling the Air Service to the public. At the same time it is an organization which with very little training could go into the field and function properly. Equipped with service type planes they would be ready for field service after a maximum training of one month. A National Guard squadron is not a paper organization but a complete unit in itself, which, after a period of about one year of organization, can be handled as a mobile unit. Its officers and men are actually present, and they represent the community and the State itself.

Bringing a community in close touch with flying gives a large field from which to pick prospective pilots. The cadet class at the Primary Flying School at Brooks Field and the special courses at this School for National Guard officers are the most effective means for increasing the number of men able to fly. The course for National Guard officers resulted in eight new pilots being added to the Tennessee Air Service during the past two years, and there is a prospect of a yearly addition of at least two.

Air Service organizations have so much more to offer an enlisted man in comparison to other branches of the service that the right type of man not only becomes interested but he also becomes a booster and a salesman of the Air Service. After his first airplane ride the average boy under 20 is usually thoroughly sold on his new venture. Another method to induce men in public life to work for a bigger and better Air Service would be to permit them to take flights. It has been Lieut. Meloy's experience that one booster will always add several others, particularly if said booster happens to be a man of prominence. He cites the case of a local bank president who became so enthusiastic after his first ride that he is now a Colonel of Air Service on the Governor's Staff and one of the most active workers in the campaign to bring a new \$100,000 airdrome to Nashville.

Lieut. Meloy visited the airdromes of nine National Guard squadrons and invariably found the officer personnel eager to remain proficient in their flying. Permitting National Guard pilots to make cross-country flights with the privilege of visiting distant towns and cities is a wonderful source of encouragement to them. The Tennessee Air Service has endeavored to attain perfection in cross-country flying, which constitutes four-fifths of their flying, and it is the usual custom of all pilots to take off and land in formation. The only airdrome flying carried on is that in connection with panel exercises, test flights, photo missions and artillery reglage missions. The pilots as a rule forget grandstand flying and attend strictly to business, and it has been found that the most effective means of curing the tendency of a few to indulge in eccentric and wild flying is to put them on the ground.

One advantage of a National Guard squadron over that of a Reserve squadron is the fact that its entire enlisted personnel is available. National Guard Regulations authorize the hire of caretakers, who must be enlisted men of the squadron, for the maintenance and repair of planes and equipment. This means that a minimum of five and a maximum of ten caretakers are on duty at the field at all times. In nearly all the existing organizations these caretakers are former Regular Army Air Service noncommissioned officers who obtained their present positions through high recommendations from their former commanding officers. These full time men are augmented by the remainder of the enlisted personnel who live in the locality where the unit is located. They are compelled to be present for one drill a week, during which time they receive instruction in airplane motors, rigging, radio, photography, and all other specialized work of the Air Service. For each drill they receive the pay and allowances of their respective grades.

There is a general and loud wail from National Guard officers when the question of equipment is brought up, the first complaint being against the planes they are flying. The National Guard squadrons were organized around the nucleus of former Air Service pilots, many of whom have flown English, French and German planes. Naturally, they are not particularly enthused over the prospect of being forced to fly "Jennies" for an indefinite period. Last summer all squadrons received training in service planes, and their success was truly remarkable. Recent information from the Chief of the Militia Bureau in regard to new equipment for the National Guard has proved a big boost to the morale of all pilots. A new plane adapted for use of National Guard squadrons will greatly improve the efficiency of all these units.

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Considerable benefit has been derived as a result of training National Guard units at Regular Army stations each summer. This has brought about a close cooperation between officers of the Regular Air Service and those of the National Guard. Both the Tennessee and Alabama squadrons feel very kindly disposed towards the officers at Maxwell Field, Montgomery, Alabama, because of the untiring efforts shown by the latter in facilitating the training of the National Guard. These summer camps are looked forward to with good feeling by all concerned, the National Guard officers realizing that the Air Service is trying to help them and the Regular officers feeling that their former war time associates are alive to the present needs of an adequate Air Service and are constantly working for its improvement.

In discussing the character of his detail Lieut. Meloy states that an officer reporting for duty with a new organization will find the first year the hardest, for it is not an easy matter to see things from the viewpoint of National Guard officers and it will take some time to realize that a Guard unit cannot be built up over night. No set rules for building up a squadron can be laid down, and the National Guard instructor must adapt himself to local conditions. The instructor has no authority and is merely serving in the capacity of an adviser. The National Guard officers invariably look to the instructor for advice and sooner or later will follow instructions given them. It is best for the instructor to make himself just one of the squadron officers and assist in all undertakings. He cannot be inactive and merely offer suggestions, because the men associated with him will follow his example. The officers will not fly unless the instructor does so himself and their interest and pride in their organization will be no greater than that shown by the instructor. The most effective means of placing the Air Service in a favorable light is for the Instructor to become a member of a civic organization and take an active part in its program.

The Tennessee Air Service deserves great credit for the work accomplished during the past three years. The pilots averaged in the neighborhood of five to ten hours or more of flying per month, attended drill one night every week in addition to flying on week-ends, and have flown nearly everywhere in the country on cross-country flights, and this despite the fact that the National Guard airmen do not receive extra pay for flying. Furthermore, they have followed the reserve officers to summer camps where they have been compelled to sit back and watch reserve officers receive flying pay while they, holding a dual commission in the National Guard and the Reserve, had to train without additional compensation.