

THE FLYING TRAINEE AT THE AIR CORPS PRIMARY FLYING SCHOOL

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THE magnificent flight of Lindbergh to Paris in May of 1927 really marks the beginning of the present universal interest of American youth in aviation. It was this spectacular feat of personal courage and physical stamina that captured their imagination and fired them with the fanatic zeal to emulate his achievement and create for themselves a career in this new sphere of endeavor.

This air-consciousness swept rapidly thru the nation. All were affected by it. It was noticeable in the play and dress of children. High school youths everywhere formed Model Clubs and reproduced miniature models of current aircraft types that rivaled their originals for perfection of design and scaled down performance. The catch phrase, "Today's pilot of models will be tomorrow's model pilot," soon established itself as a definite fact. College students demanded courses in aeronautical engineering. Private schools in flying and for mechanical training sprang into existence in every thickly populated district in answer to the public's desire to fly. Even commercial aviation sensed the change in popular sentiment. Passenger traffic received a marked impetus and air mail and express tonnage increased on an otherwise inexplicable scale. Public interest in the U.S. Army's Air Corps Training Center reflected this national popularity in a sudden barometer-like rise in the receipt of letters of inquiry, and subsequently, in applications for training. The attention of America's young career-men was focused on the Government's aerial training system, its efficiency having previously been accorded universal recognition and the professional opportunities it presented. Here they found an outlet for their desire to learn to fly, and at no expense to themselves, plus unlimited possibilities for commercial connections thereafter, or for service with the military establishment.

By a fortunate coincidence, the effects of this engulfing wave of interest arrived coincidental with the preliminary efforts of the Air Corps to absorb the increase in personnel included in the Five Year Program as authorized by the Act of July 2, 1926. In order to raise the standard of the graduate of the school to a type readily assimilable by the Air Corps of the Regular Army, the National Guard and the Reserve Units, it was decided to step-up the entrance requirements. This policy served the dual purpose of curtailing the number of successful applicants, a vast number of whom would have been eligible for train-

ing under the former lower requirements, and of limiting this preferred type to men of the highest possible educational and physical calibre.

October 15, 1931, marks the date of the geographical re-concentration of the Air Corps Training Center activities in San Antonio, Texas, and its environments, for it was on this date that the beautiful and permanent structures within the confines of the world's greatest flying field were first occupied. On this date the two Primary Flying Schools from Brooks Field and from March Field were consolidated and their airplanes, equipment and personnel moved to their new home at Randolph Field. From this move it is comparatively simple to obtain an accurate picture or cross section of the later day cadet student body, as all records beginning with this event are readily available. In consequence, all statistical data is commonly presented from this point.

The Flying Cadets are all young, unmarried citizens, between the ages of twenty and twenty-seven years inclusive, of good character, sound physique, and who have had at least two years of college work. If lacking the required educational credentials, they must demonstrate their proficiency by successfully passing examinations in United States History, English, General History, Geography, Higher Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry, and Physics. The educational equation is simplified for many of these aspirants by their possession of diplomas and degrees from the country's many colleges and universities.

Professionally, these trainees - considering their youth - are from all walks of life. As a class, the civilian element is in preponderance; however, at times there is a liberal sprinkling of men with a military background. Geographically, all states in the United States are represented, with occasional applicants from the various foreign possessions. Students from foreign countries are frequently included in the student officer classification. This latter group approximates about twenty-five per cent of the entire enrollment. Their training is identical to that of the cadet, but they live and are administered separately.

During the interval embraced by the dates of October 15, 1931, and March 1, 1935, a total of 2,022 would-be pilots have reported to the Air Corps Primary Flying School. Of this number, 1,595, or approximately seventy-five per cent were Flying Cadets, and the

remaining 427 were student officers. The cadet increment was comprised of 1,355 civilians and 240 military men, while the 427 student officers were classified as 407 Regular Army officers and 20 foreign students coming from the following countries: 7 from Mexico; 2 Brazil, 2 Philippines, 3 China, 2 Turkey, and 1 each from the following countries: Germany, Guatemala, Cuba and Colombia.

Other factors relating to this group are interesting. For example: of the 2,022 entrants, 1,480, or 73 per cent were college graduates. Of this number, 1,042 were from the many colleges and universities of the country at large, while 398 were graduates from the U.S. Military Academy and 40 from the U.S. Naval Academy. Then, too, of the 2,002 who enrolled, exactly 950, or 46.9 per cent, completed the course and graduated from the Primary School at Randolph Field. The remaining 1,072 are accounted for as follows: 1,009 eliminated for flying or academic deficiencies, 58 resigned of their own volition, and 5 were killed. This final figure deserves especial consideration and is considered remarkable. It represents the infinitesimal percentage of less than one-half of one per cent of the total number graduated. When compared with similar statistics for training during the war period or with the peace time records of the schools of the armies of other nations, this small proportion is a monumental tribute to the efficiency of the Air Corps training methods.

The two classes now undergoing instruction are also very interesting. The present primary phase or entering class of October 15, 1935, is composed of 58 student officers and 92 Flying Cadets. Of the former, six are older officers of the permanent establishment, four are officers of foreign countries, and 48 are young second lieutenants who graduated from the Military Academy in June of 1935.

In the July class, or those on the Basic phase, there now remain 12 officers, all of the United States Army, and 50 Flying Cadets. The total personnel now undergoing instruction in both classes is made up of 70 officers and 142 cadets. A detailed study of the latter discloses the following facts. The 142 men from civilian pursuits attended 89 leading colleges and universities of the Nation. There are seven representatives from the University of California, four each from the institutions of Idaho, Minnesota, Tennessee, and the Idaho State College and the remainder from other leading educational centers. Seventy-three, or approximately 50% of these 142, are graduates, while the remainder, except for two who took the entrance examination, had the prescribed minimum of two years' college

work. As to geographical distribution, there are thirty-seven states represented; California leads with 24, Texas has 11, Washington 8, and Pennsylvania and Minnesota 7 each.

In reply to the question regarding the future of the trainee, this answer can be made: First, practically all who finish at the Primary Flying School graduate four months later from the Advanced Flying School. Following that, the American officers are assigned to Air Corps stations for duty with tactical troops. Their career in the service was definitely established previously; now they are but committed to the Air Corps as the branch of their choice. Second, the Flying Cadet is also assigned to a tactical unit where - still as a cadet - he obtains an additional year of seasoning and experience. This is followed by a year, or perhaps two, of active duty as a second lieutenant in the Air Corps Reserve. Upon completion of this period, he reverts to his former civilian status, but he may and can maintain active contact with the Service through membership in the National Guard or Organized Reserves. Third, as a civilian with this wealth of flying experience behind him, he is in a favorable position to seek employment with a commercial aviation company. Then, too, there is the recent possibility of securing a permanent commission in the Air Corps.

As an additional reward for the time devoted to aviation, the Flying Cadet has the consolation of knowing that he has fulfilled his youthful ambition - to fly; that he has received the best training in the world, an intensified schooling that would cost him a fortune to procure from outside sources if it could be duplicated; and, further, that he has been given other emoluments while receiving free this unusual training. He must also realize that he is one of the four hundred persons selected by his Government annually from the enormously interested collegiate group to receive this expansive military flying education.

The time spent by the flying cadet in his favored occupation is not wasted. As a preferred individual, the thrill and exhilaration of aviation as a sport is ample compensation for the two or three years devoted to the Service. Also, during this period of his life, while he is gainfully occupied preparing himself for a career, many of his associates are idle or are aimlessly busied with nondescript tasks at mediocre salaries. Then, too, while mastering the elusive and exclusive art of flying, he is molding his character and developing qualities of personality that make for better citizenship through his contact with the disciplined orderliness of military life. The statement that the time devoted by the trainee to his training as a military pilot is "spent" is a misnomer as, on the contrary, it represents an "investment" in a probable future career.