

THE WEST POINTER AT THE WEST POINT OF THE AIR

By 2nd Lieut. Jack W. Hickman, Air Corps (CE)

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To those uninitiated we want to say right here that the A.C.T.C. is not another bureau for giving loans to farms. Rather it is the institution that makes flyers out of farmers - the Air Corps Training Center. Another common misconception is that Randolph Field and the A.C.T.C. are synonymous. Randolph is but one-half of the entire picture. It houses the Primary and Basic phases of the training. The advanced course is carried on at Kelly Field on the other side of town. Both fields are under the command of one general officer. Each in turn has its own commandant and staff of instructors. And then, of course, over all is felt the lightly benevolent influence of the Eighth Corps Area. But enough of these administrative details. Suffice it to say that there are plenty of people looking after the affairs and welfares of the student officers.

And so we pass to life at Randolph. The new class reports about the middle of September. From then until the middle of October duties consist mainly of initialing the bulletin board once each day. The remaining twenty-three hours and fifty-nine minutes are the individual's responsibility. The social whirl is terrific. It seems that the sight of fifty spanking-new, able-bodied second lieutenants makes any hostess go berserk. The latchstring at Fort Sam Houston is always out. At Randolph the usual rounds of handshakes and shindigs are in order. With a view of giving a bit of practical training, most young officers find themselves attached to a squadron for troop duty. These morning conferences with a kindly C.O. are invaluable when it comes to picking up lessons about mess, supply and paper work.

During the afternoon most men devote themselves to some form of voluntary athletics. This takes the form of a bitterly contested kitten-ball game, a set or two on the tennis courts, a battle of strikes and spares on the local bowling alleys, a red hot ping pong series, or even a rubber of raucous bridge barring no "holts." The average officer finds this month the best part of his graduation leave. The surroundings are ideal. The post is the most beautiful and well appointed in the Army. The Air Corps has a justified reputation of free-and-easy hospitality. San Antonio is a delightfully friendly

city, combining the charm of the old South with the dash of dusky Mexico and the modernism of the West.

And then came the dawn! Late in October on a clear, cheerful Texas Monday morning, the student takes his first ride in a PT-3. He climbs to a thousand feet and sees his home from the air and traces the Austin road into San Antonio. He splashes thru his first sloppy turn. From now on, it's early to bed and early to rise makes one healthy, wealthy, and solo. Along with two hours of flying there is an equal amount of ground school each day. The courses are in the main a bit of specialization on the West Point academics. While at Randolph, one studies Engines, Carter's Aerodynamics, Navigation, Gunnery, Maps, Meteorology, Buzzer, and Equipment of the Pilot. These may sound difficult, but a half-hour each day will keep the average student officer properly prepared and proficient.

Of course, from the first day everyone thinks of but a single topic - flying. During the first or second week in November the all-absorbing topic of conversation is the first solo. Some morning after a particularly rough landing, the instructor clammers out of the ship and says, "Well, you can't do any worse alone." The fledgling gulps twice and gives her the gun. At four hundred feet he wiggles the stick a couple of times, tentatively, just to see if the ship recognizes him. A few turns and he glides in to a breathlessly happy landing. The solo is successfully accomplished! That alone has been sufficient recompense for hours of study and training. If a "washing out" takes place next week, the solo has made it all worthwhile.

From the Primary Stage, the fortunate few making the grade move across the field for basic training. Here the stress is laid on more difficult phases of flying - blind flying, radio, night flying, formation, and strange field landings. A bit more of selective culling and the two hundred-hour wonders are ready for Kelly Field and the Advanced School. The student officer is given an opportunity to specialize in his favorite branch of flying - be it Pursuit, Observation, Bombing or Attack. There is no excuse for washing out of this school. The ground school is no more extensive than before. The flying can be mastered by anyone who has satisfactorily finish-

ed Randolph and continues to apply himself.

And so comes October week and graduation. There is the same old lump in the throat and throb in the handclasp that every West Pointer felt at his

last graduation. The class passes in review - formation flying. The speeches are said. The wings are pinned. It is goodbye to the West Point of the Air, San Antonio, and Texas. It is hello to the Air Corps.