

2nd PROVISIONAL WING

LINEAGE

STATIONS

Park Place, TX

ASSIGNMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

COMMANDERS

LTC Seth W. Cook

Cpt Edgar W. Bagnell, acting commander

Maj Roy S. Brown,

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The Second Provisional Wing of the Air Service has ended its brief career at Park Place. The joys and sorrows of "Fighting the War in Texas" have passed. Only memories remain. But they are such memories as quicken the pulse and bring smiles in recollection even of the things that then seemed hardships. No one who was there will forget the battles against wind and rain, the hard work with pick and shovel, the wild rides, the ball games, the banquets, the quarantine, and

the friendships formed at Houston.

For five months the 500 men comprising this organization kept in trim awaiting orders that would send us over the battle lines of Europe. We were ready from the very beginning. All had graduated from the schools of the service. Ours was the only outfit of its kind in the United States, save the First Wing at Mineola. The orders finally came and then, in the midst of our packing, occurred the armistice that ended our overseas dreams.

The Wing started on its humble but hopeful career in the end of a hall in the upper school building at Ellington Field on a sweltering day in the middle of June, 1918. As an uninvited guest, we were not welcomed with open arms, but considered more a necessary evil—to be tolerated until such time as we could fly alone.

Our mission was the topic of much conversation. Being a distinct and separate organization, the imagination of all the natives at Ellington ran wild, the favorite rumor being "Mexican Border Service." But with an abundance of transportation boldly stamped "A. E. F." there were plenty of volunteers to join our little party, especially in view of the fact that a dozen Cadillac touring cars were reposing gracefully in the warehouse assigned us.

The personnel, consisting of our commanding officer, at that time Major but later Lieutenant Colonel Seth W. Cook, and the Wing engineer officer, together with our tall and dignified Wing armament officer, could all travel in the front seat of a Cadillac car without serious discomfort.

Colonel Cook is one of the veterans of the service. He started his army career June 1, 1898, as a trooper of the Fourth Cavalry in the Philippines. Two years and a half later he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Third Cavalry, then stationed in Northern Luzon. He served with various cavalry regiments, received his first lieutenantcy in 1909 and in 1916 was made a captain, placed on the detached officers' list and sent to the army aviation school at San Diego, Cal. There he received his "J. M. A." rating in May, 1917. He was promoted as a temporary major of cavalry the following August and detailed to aviation. On August 1, 1918, he was made a lieutenant colonel of the National Army, and 20 days later this rank was given him in the Air Service.

He was the personification of modesty. He never discussed his nine and one-half years of foreign service. Neither would he permit others to discuss it. He had served on the Mexican Border; he had won newspaper praise years before through leading a searching party through Hawaii; he was recognized as one of the army's crack polo players. But even now it is almost a violation of orders to mention these things.

Colonel, then Major, Cook came to Ellington Field June 5, 1918, from Washington, under orders to organize the Wing. The task of choosing a field was first disposed of, two locations being considered. A larger field, a short distance from Galveston was proposed, and also the Park Place location, which was owned by the Druitt Estate. The latter was chosen, due to its proximity to Houston and Ellington Field, adequate water and rail facilities, and general accessibility. These natural advantages, short transportation hauls from our base of supplies, conveniences for officers and enlisted men living outside the field, low commutation rates and lines of

communication, were all taken into consideration in reaching a decision.

The site at Park Place covered 258 acres, and an option was secured on a similar area on the opposite side of Pine Gully, to be used for another group as soon as the Wing expanded. The original plan contemplated simply a mixed group consisting of three squadrons. The ultimate aim was a Wing such as operated overseas, the training given to simulate overseas service as closely as possible with the equipment available. With this object in view the personnel of the organization was an important problem, the choice being confined exclusively to officers and enlisted men thoroughly trained and ready for active field duty.

With the forming of a mixed group as a nucleus, it was the plan to later expand, if the occasion demanded, to a larger Wing with a Wing Headquarters and five distinct and separate groups occupying fields in the immediate vicinity and operating as complete units under the headquarters. These groups were to consist of bombing, observation, pursuit, repair and supply squadrons, each with its full complement of officers and equipment.

The first weeks of organization were spent in making surveys of the field, layouts of the general arrangement, consideration and study of sewerage, lighting and drainage problems, with a view of handling these vital questions in a simple and effective way with the limited funds and equipment available. In this connection no precedent had been established, and we were left largely to our own resources in working out a suitable arrangement. To our commanding officer was due the original and compact scheme of general arrangement, using headquarters circle as a hub, with squadron streets radiating from the common center. This arrangement simplified construction problems immensely, provided for the minimum amount of roads, sewer lines, water piping and line construction for lighting and power, which was so necessary in view of the contemplated short duration of our camp.

While this work was going on the services of Ellington Field were obtained to place in flying condition the first shipment of 20 ships and a number of motor trucks which had already arrived. In the meantime suitable personnel was being requested from the various fields and schools to complete the three squadrons, which was the original authorized strength.

Personnel, as well as funds, were slow in arriving, as was the necessary authority for moving to our new field. The two best squadrons at Ellington Field—the 190th and 191st—had been assigned to us for duty. And at the welcome order to move, our truck train, with its cargo of equipment and eager men, proceeded to the new field, and "Cook's Flying Circus" made its initial debut and opening performance at Park Place.

The field was soon a scene of feverish activity, with hangar tents and tents for officers and men being erected, supplies issued, and organization begun. About this time the flying personnel was reporting, each man's first comment being a confidential inquiry as to when we were "going across." These officers were given their preference, as far as possible, in choosing the squadron with which they preferred association. And from the more experienced, tentative officers were chosen for the various squadron duties.

The work on sewer lines, electric lighting, water piping and construction of mess halls and bath

houses was now actively under way; the work being performed chiefly with enlisted labor and the assistance of officers who had experience along these lines in civil life. This work, considering the lack of funds, tools and materials, progressed rapidly, with very few mistakes in judging future requirements and very small expenditures of government funds. In fact, a great deal of credit must be given the officers and enlisted men for the effective results obtained during this trying construction period.

In the meantime ship crews and transportation organizations were gradually developed with splendid material from each squadron, and the chaos assumed a semblance of military organization. As the personnel increased, a full quota of equipment was acquired for each of the original squadrons, and flying started with the ships on hand.

With the organization plans of the first arrivals well under way, the personnel for the 343rd Squadron, recruited from experienced enlisted men from other fields and officers from our own field, was started. This squadron never reached anywhere near its full strength, but its work was commendable from the beginning.

Included in the construction work on the field was a set of machine-gun butts suitably located in Pine Gully, away from other activities, where the machine guns were tested. Another machine-gun butt, to which the ships were taxied and the synchronizing gears tested, was also erected in the same gully. All of this construction work was done by the armament personnel.

With the advent of our meteorological detachment, which was determined to conquer the air currents with little toy balloons and provide us with accurate information on weather conditions, our organization assumed its finishing touches. This was even more true after the Seventy-Third Photographic Detachment reported and took possession of the palatial studio shack that had been constructed by our men.

The airplane equipment included 80 planes of the following types: S-4-C single-seated speed scouts, with LeRhône nine-cylinder rotary motors; R-4 Curtiss gunnery ships, with Curtiss V-2-3 motors; JX4-H, JN4-HG, and JN6-HP ships, with Hispano Suiza type A eight-cylinder motors, and JN4-D dual training ships, "with OX5 Curtiss eight-cylinder motors.

For the greater part of our existence the field was nameless, but for a few weeks in September and October the camp was officially designated Ream Field. The name was given in memory of Major William R. Ream, the first flying surgeon of the Air Service. Major Ream accompanied the British-American flying circus which started from Indianapolis August 24 for St. Louis. He was killed in a crash that day. Just as we had grown accustomed to the name, discovery was made at Washington that the same name had been given a California Field. The order naming our location was revoked and thenceforth, as at the beginning, it was simply Park Place.

Much could be added regarding interesting and amusing incidents attending this brief history. There were the maneuvers, expeditions of the 190th and 191st Squadrons to Port Lavaca and Kingsville, respectively. There were the flights to Dallas, to the Cotton Palace Exposition at Waco, to innumerable cities and towns where exhibitions were given to help rouse interest in the sale of Liberty Bonds. There was the carrying of a prisoner by airplane; the establishment of the

first aerial fresh food express service; the paying off of troops in the field by airplane messenger service, and innumerable other interesting flights. In the camp there were many other activities of interest, but these can best be described in separate articles.

The most memorable date in all the history of the Wing was November 13. On that day the camp was abandoned and truck loads of cheering men started a journey they believed might mean partial realization of their overseas dreams. The entire Wing had been ordered to Mineola, Long Island. The baggage cars of the train were packed. All was in readiness and the squadrons stretched out in the grass at Harrisburg station waiting for the coaches that would carry them East. Then the orders were cancelled. A sorrowful group of men returned to Park Place and reopened the camp.

Within a few days after this incident, Colonel Cook was transferred East and Captain Edgar W. Bagnell, commanding officer of the 191st Squadron, took charge as acting commander of the Wing. There were few more jovial men in the Air Service than "Hap" Bagnell, as he was familiarly known. He had received most of his early training at Mineola and later had made an excellent record in the organization of the engineering department at Kelly Field, San Antonio. He remained in command of the Wing until the arrival from Washington of Major Roy S. Brown, who reported December 16.

Major Brown, as had Colonel Cook, started his army career as a trooper. As he explained it, he attended the military academy at West Point in 1908 but did not agree on mathematics with the academic board, and departed to enlist in 1910 in Troop E of the Fifteenth Cavalry. He received his commission in November, 1912, and was assigned to the First Cavalry. He started to fly in 1915 at San Diego, later joining the punitive expedition into Mexico with the First Aero Squadron. Upon the entrance of the United States into the war he was made a member of the aviation examining board at central department headquarters at Chicago, and on July 6, 1917, flew from Chicago to Rantoul, IL., and opened the aviation school there. In September he went to the experimental field at Langley Field, Va., where he conducted many of the first experiments on actual flying tests with the Liberty Motor.

Shortly after his arrival the disbanding of the Wing began. The once lively flying circus ended its existence, its members going to all parts of the nation. Park Place was returned to its former inhabitants and now the stern challenge of the sentry, pacing his post at night at the edge of the flying field, is only a memory. The only sound is the munching of the cattle and horses peacefully browsing there.

Activities of the Wing began to wane shortly after the signing of the armistice and then followed the mad rush of officers to get out of the service. This had somewhat subsided by December 31, when orders were received for the demobilization. But before the equipment could be checked over and the field abandoned, the weather became so inclement it was necessary to transfer the entire personnel to the City Auditorium. That was on January 20. On February 4 about two-thirds of the enlisted men were sent to fourteen demobilization camps in various parts of the country. Six days later the last member of the enlisted personnel was discharged—at least that was the general belief—but, shortly afterwards, Private Cloutier, who had been transferred to Ellington, was returned. Cloutier became everything from sergeant major to orderly.

The Wing "family" became so small that it was removed to a room in the Milby Hotel—a most fitting morgue for the reception of the broken Wing.

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.