

10 AERO SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE

10 Aero Squadron organized, 31 May 1917

STATIONS

Kelly Field, TX

Chanute Field, IL, 7 Jul 1917-2 Nov 1917

Garden City, NY

ASSIGNMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

COMMANDERS

Capt John C. McDonnell

1st Lt Gilmore L. Tilbrook, 28 Sep 1917

Maj M. F. Davis, 8 Sep 1918

1st Lt Louis H. Kronig, 25 Sep 1918

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

The 10th Aero Squadron was organized on May 31, 1917, at Kelly Field, Texas, with Major (then Captain) John C. McDonnell, in command.

Of the Companies of the Provisional Aviation Camp, Captain McDonnell chose Company I, First Regiment out of which to form the Squadron.

From June 19 to the date of departure, the squadron was one of the busiest places in camp. Equipment and supplies had to be requisitioned, the records of each man had to be prepared, and above all, the men composing the Squadron, had to be changed from recruits to soldiers. Headquarters, Kelly Field, issued No. 46, July 5, ordered the 10th Aero Squadron, Signal Corps, to proceed to Signal Corps, Aviation School, Rantoul, Illinois.

On the night of July 4, one of the most destructive storms of the year swept across the camp. Tents were blown down, equipment soaked and every man in camp drenched to the skin. Company streets were changed into lakes and pools of water covered the floor of every tent. On the following morning, the day of departure, that part of Kelly field not under water was a quagmire. The squadron was due to leave at 1300 but it required from early in the morning until late in the afternoon to complete the loading of equipment.

The squadron arrived at Rantoul and detrained in the afternoon of July 7, the first Aero Squadron to enter the Chanute Aviation Field. With Chanute coming to life, Rantoul was a bustle of activity which fed the excitement felt by its citizens when the 159-man 10th Aero Squadron arrived in town—by special train—from Camp Kelly in San Antonio, Texas. The news stories reflected the feelings of the citizens. "Young men in khaki uniforms, most all of them wearing wrist watches, are everywhere . . . and there is evidence in the facial expressions that this is no child's play, but the grim preparation of war." The squadron, comprised of four officers and 155 enlisted men, was primarily a support squadron being made up of mechanics, truck drivers, etc. Captain J. E. C. McDonnell was in command. This officer had served with Pershing on the Mexican border and was one of the most expert men in the army in the tailspin and in the intricacies of maneuver. He had the reputation of being the first man to loop-the-loop in an army plane. After being welcomed by Captain Benedict, the squadron marched down the main street of Rantoul to the accompaniment of the cheers of the village's citizens and then to the field. The mascot of the squadron, a tiny Pekingese, brought up the rear of the march. The following day, the women of Rantoul officially welcomed Company B and the 10th Aero Squadron by presenting each unit with 40 cherry and custard pies. The men of the squadron were assigned to machine shop for motor repair and testing, carb and magneto repair and adjustment and trouble shooting.

This field was located just outside and bordering on the edge of Rantoul, and covered an area of approximately one square mile. It consisted of the flying field, a double row of barracks capable of accommodating six squadrons with quarters for the squadron and field staff officers just north of the barracks, and separated from them a large modern hospital. The hangars located between the flying field and the barracks were large wooden structures approximately two hundred feet long and fifty feet wide, capable of holding from six to eight large Curtiss JN-4 flying machines. The hangars extended from end to end of the field, parallel to the barracks, twelve in all.

The field was still under construction, and it was not until several weeks later upon the

completion of the machine shop and the installation of the lathes and drill presses, that the first wheels were turned which signified the beginning of Chanute field as an aviation instruction field. The men of the squadron were assigned to the machine shop for motor repair and testing, carburetor and magneto repair and adjustment, and trouble shooting. Late in July and early in August, the assembly and erection and repair shop was organized to assemble the planes which began to arrive almost daily.

On July 26, the first Cadet Detachment arrived to undergo flying instruction. The first week in August marked the real start of flying training. About this time there were twenty-five machines on the field and about fifty students, most of whom had never been up in a machine. It was not long before motors and machines were turned over to the Engineering Dept, for every kind of repair. This necessitated the re-organization of the Repair Dept., separate departments soon branched out, wing repair, fuselage repair, and motor installation, with the installation of band saws and wood-working machinery, planes were almost built completely on the field.

After the intense heat, leaky tents and uncomfortable cots of Kelly yield, the electric lighted, steam heated barracks at Rantoul, with hot and cold water showers, spring beds with mattresses and feather pillows, were much appreciated by the men. The people of nearby towns built up a strong friendship between themselves and the men of Chanute Field.

On 7 October 1917, Chanute received orders from the War Department ordering the 10th and the 16th Aero Squadrons to be ready to leave within 48 hours for Ft. Wood at Mineola, New York. The men, anxious to be off to fight the Hun, cheered the news. Chanute had expected to retain the squadrons through the winter, and had given them permanent assignments in camp. The news of a student departure required a certain amount of shuffling of personnel. All the field's best truck drivers and motorcycle riders were included in the order and several such men from the 38th and 39th squadrons were transferred to the 10th and 16th. These two squadrons were to become part of the 3rd Provisional Aero Squadron once they arrived in France.

It was a day of great celebration when headquarters, Chanute Field, ordered the Squadron to prepare for service overseas, on October 25, 1917. While this order intended that every man of the Squadron should leave with the organization, it was discovered on checking up that many of them held positions of such responsibility at the field, that it was decided to transfer these men out of the squadron. The next week was spent in packing and marking all the additional equipment of the new men who were transferred into the Squadron. When 1st Lieut. Gilmore L. Tilbrook, (who had been appointed in command when Major McDonnell, S.C., was relieved) received Special Order No, 63, Headquarters, SCAS., Chanute Field, to entrain at the Rantoul siding at 10:00 P.M. it was not more than an hour after the train drew into the siding, that the Squadron was on its way eastward to the Atlantic coast.

On November 3, the Squadron arrived at the Concentration Camp at Garden City, Long Island, New York, to await embarkation orders. The next three weeks was a long, tedious wait to the men, but this time was completely occupied with drill morning and afternoon, instructions in pitching shelter tents, and the correct method of making up a "pack". Equipment inspections

were regular and frequent and any deficiencies or unserviceable articles of equipment were immediately drawn or replaced, so the Squadron left the States with the finest and best possible equipment

On the evening of December 3, 1917, the Headquarters S.C. Concentration Camp, Garden City, notified Squadron Headquarters to prepare to move in six hours, and late that night the squadron started on the journey to the port of embarkation. Six o'clock the following morning the Squadron detrained at the Philadelphia Navy Yard and a few hours later were aboard the S.S. Northland.

The following day the squadron arrived at the Philadelphia Navy Yard and boarded the S.S. Northland. On 5 Dec the Northland steamed out of port. On 8 Dec the anchor was dropped off the town of Halifax Nova Scotia. After the explosion of a munition ship, it was decided to collect a fund to alleviate the sufferings of the town folks the amount collected amounted to several thousand dollars from the entire Northland. The mayor send the ship a message to express his gratitude.

On the morning of the 15th, the Northland swung out into the stream and into place in the convoy, consisting of nine ships in all. Christmas day the skeleton work of the New Brighton Light of Liverpool, England, appeared over the bow and by noon the Northland dropped anchor in the river Mersey.

The troops were quickly landed that night, and as the landing stage was but a short distance from the trainer, little time was lost in transferring the baggage from the floats to the small, square box-like Continental freight cars, the loading of which was completed shortly before mid-night.

On the morning of 26 Dec, the trained steamed in Southhampton the port of embarkation for France. Late in the afternoon the men were marched aboard the Marguerite for transport across the channel. The Marguerite was an ancient channel boat of the side wheeler type. In design and size it reassembled Fulton's first attempt to propel boats by steam. The name plate in the saloon had long since been worn smooth and the date of launching was obliterated but upon close inspection the figures 1, 6, 4, and 8 were discernible and it was unanimously agreed that this must be the date of her first trip across the channel. Made almost entirely of wood, every joint and beam gave out a mournful squeak as her engine wheezed and her paddles dipped in the water she slowly wheeled about and pointed her nose towards the coast of France.

The ship arrived on 27 Dec at the port of Le Havre and marched up the hill to the rest camp eight miles from the wharves.

The Rest Camp consisted of about a dozen rows of small conical tents about twelve feet in diameter, to which from eight to ten men were assigned, the men sleeping on the ground. The Camp was located on the heights that overlooked the city and exposed on all aides to the penetrating cold winds that swept across the heights from the Atlantic. As the sides of the tents often lacked from four to six inches of touching the ground, the snow, which was then six inches

deep, blew in under the tent flaps, spreading a layer of snow over everyone during the night.

It was with little regret the men left Rest Camp No. 1 at La Havre, and marched down to the Railway terminal to entrain once more. When the Squadron arrived at the terminal they experienced for the first time, travel "a la guerre". The coaches were plainly marked "8 chevaux" or "40 hommes,, the sides of the car were without windows but with large sliding doors on each side, furnishing ample ventilation and light; especially ventilation, with the temperature at about 20 below. The floor of the coach were covered with straw with a lingering odor that suggested the late departure of the "8 chevaux". Four squads were assigned to each car, about thirty men in each one, Sleeping accommodations were again a problem. The men who had figured "40 Chevaux" per car had evidently reasoned that the "hommes" like the "chevaux" would sleep standing up. Standing up, thirty yank "hommes" made a close fit in this French coach, but finding room to sleep thirty Yank "hemmee" was something else again, so much so, that the individual and collective idea of the carload, failed to find the answer during the following two nights.

At daybreak on January 1st, the men detrained, and marched off through the little town of St. Maixent to the large French armory, Canclaux Barracks. The Squadron spent almost the entire month of January at this place, and except for the time when the squadron was not drilling, liberty passes were allowed to the men to visit the town and get their first look at France. The rations though were somewhat scarce, consisting of "corned willy" three times a day, occasionally some jam, and no "seconds".

On Jan. 26, 1918, the squadron once again entrained and started under way to "America's largest aviation camp in France" at Issoudun, Indre, France, arriving on the afternoon of January 27, which marked the date when the Squadron was once more to start in service, as part of the organization to maintain an aviation center, almost three months after leaving its last aviation station - Chanute Field, Illinois.

As the Squadron had not had any previous experience on the small, fast Chasse French planes, the mechanics were schooled in the care and repair of these new flying ships during the following two or three weeks.

The new post was known as the Third Aviation Instruction Center, consisting of (at that time) seven fields, each field training the pilots in some one particular phase of the complete training.

On February 7, 1918, the Squadron left the main field and proceeded to Field 7, which was located about fifteen kilometers from the main camp. The unit remained at this field, acquiring further knowledge and experience on the care and maintenance of the planes used in training. On February 20, 1918, Headquarters, 3rd AIC issued a memo directing the Tenth Aero Squadron to proceed to a location about ten kilometers from Field 7, to start the new combat field of the center at field 8.

On the day the squadron arrived at Field 8, the Field consisted of two barracks, two partially erected barracks and, due to tht constant drizzle of several days a huge mud hole.

The Squadron for the next two or three weeks, shouldered the arms of the Aviation Section, the pick and shovel, and proceeded to change the mud hole, known officially as Field 8, into a place to live and an aviation training field. They were assisted in this by the 644th Aero Squadron, who arrived several weeks after the arrival of the Tenth Squadron. The partially completed barracks were finished, new ones erected and completed, latrines sunk, the administration building being the last to be finished.

During the latter part of the month the first large canvas hangar arrived from the Main Field, and work was immediately commenced on its erection which was soon completed, followed closely by two others so that when the first planes arrived, about the second week of March, 1918, they were run into the hangars and the field was ready to commence training.

The following months witnessed the gradual expansion of the Field, Several more hangars being erected and more planes added to the Field. The work of the crew men, consisted in the care of the planes, keeping them tuned up and the making of minor repairs. Major repairs were sent to the Main Camp, but as the number of machines increased, it was found more efficient to make repairs at Field 8, as it required less time and economized transportation. This necessitated the organization of major repair hangar, which was put in charge of one of the first-class Sergeants of the Squadron. Motor repairs, except slight ones were sent to the machine shop at the Main Field, but to make a better arrangement a hangar was set aside for all planes that required motor to be changed or have new motors installed.

While the Squadron never had the good fortune to serve on the front or even under fire it is content in the knowledge that the service it rendered in the S.O.S. was just as important as duty in the Zone of Advance. Many of the American aces were trained at the 3rd A.I.C., and finished their training at Field 8.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE UNIT HISTORIES

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Sources

US Army Order of Battle 1919-1941. Steven E. Clay. Combat Studies Institute Press. US Army Combined Arms Center. Fort Leavenworth, KS. Nd.