

AIR SERVICE MECHANICS SCHOOL

LINEAGE

STATIONS

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

THEN America heard the call of war in the summer of 1917 and began girding her loins for the fray, one of the first of her many rude awakenings was the realization that she was sadly deficient and years behind the other great nations of the world in one of the most vital branches of present-day war-fare—Aeronautics. France had for years been carrying on exhaustive experiments in the science and: had attained a degree of perfection far in advance of America's fondest dreams. Germany likewise was a foe to be reckoned with in the air as well as on the ground. England and

even Italy were years ahead of us in Aviation and America, the most progressive and modern of nations was just beginning to wake up. But no sooner was the realization of this deficiency awakened than a determination was made to equal and if necessary, even to excel all others in this great new method of warfare, hitherto untried and unknown. The determination, however, was the easiest part of the plan; how to put it into execution was the next problem, and a vital and pressing one it was. America had no airplanes. She had no aviators nor aviation fields at which to train any. But with a rapidity characteristic of Yankee ingenuity she rapidly overcame all these obstructions to progress. It remained for France to provide the greatest obstacle of all and this she did by making a plea for 50,000 trained aero mechanics. Only those men at that time employed in various small aeroplane plants throughout the country were in any way familiar with the science of Aeroplane Mechanics and very few indeed they were. But nothing daunted, America at once set to work to provide them and she succeeded admirably.

Kelly Field, one of the best-established and oldest aviation fields at that time (although all of them were in their infancy) was naturally selected for the establishment of a school. And thus was born the E. M. T. D. (Enlisted Mechanics Training Department), later known as the A. S. M. S. (Air Service Mechanics' School), one of the largest and most efficient departments on the Field at the present time.

Major Dana H. Crissy and Capt. D. J. Neumuller were assigned here from Washington to take charge of the work of organization and were given the instructions that all enlisted men available should be given instruction. One-half of the little building just west of the Officer's mess, on Kelly No. 1, which had previously been used as the Field's first Headquarters Building, was utilized as an office, or headquarters for the school. The office furniture was as scanty as the other equipment of the school and it comprised one desk, one typewriter and a typewriter crate which was used as a chair. Glenno Brockerman, now a Master Electrician, comprised the office staff. Six men then at work in the hangars of the Flying Department

were questioned concerning their desire of "going to school and then returning as instructors in a ground school." The six eagerly accepted this proffered "opportunity" and were thereafter referred to as the "College Men." But fate intervened and they never reached "College." And finally, after a disconcerting mix-up in records and transfers they were assigned "en bloc" to the E. M. T. D. as instructors. Others were chosen by the same method and after a severe grueling by the two officers in charge, the best material was finally selected and assigned to certain specific branches of instruction. Captain Neumuller was Officer in Charge and also head of the Airplane Course, one-half of the proposed curriculum,. Capt. V. L. Burge was head of the Aero Motors Course, the other subject prescribed by Washington. The new school was formally opened and instruction begun on the morning of

October 17th, when the first detail of students, was marched for a mile along the dusty Texas road (later macadamized) to the tent hangars where the school was located.

The first day was devoted largely to the matter of receiving the new students and preparing rosters. Then that evening the inevitable occurred—a representative Texas sandstorm which nearly blew the infant school off the map. It cannot be said, of course, that it was disorganized by this unfortunate occurrence, for an organization had hardly been effected as yet, but nevertheless it was demoralized for a period of time at least, and when school next opened it was in one of the large, red hangars of more substantial build, where the wind and the rain might come and go without any material damage.

But the school had its handicaps. Attendance at classes was subordinated to other squadron duties

and "guard and necessary fatigue" was a constant source of worry which upset the morale of the entire school. Some students only attended one or two days a week and as a result the time they did spend under instruction was practically wasted. However, in spite of all these obstacles, at the end of the first month, the then prescribed length of the course 1040 men had been under instruction and most of them were graduated. Then more speed and more graduates were demanded from Washington. Despairingly, but with no other alternative in view, the heads of the department obtained about 50 more instructors and then cut the course down from one month to two weeks. In order to get the greatest possible concentration, Capt. Xeumuller then suggested to Washington that the men under instruction be assigned to the school, for instruction purposes there only, and that they be relieved from all other duty. But this request met with no compliance and therefore Washington was informed that it was humanly impossible to put men through the school in two weeks, the old schedule of one month not even being adequate.

On January 7th, 1918, Major George E. Stratemeyer, then in the Flying Department, was placed in charge, and an entire re-organization of the school was made. Maj. Stratemeyer was enabled to obtain seven of the large steel hangars facing the Quartermaster Depot Road, and also obtained more officers and added them to the staff. Cooperation between these officers and the enlisted men, the latter both instructors and students, caused the school to

Testing Block

grow and flourish at a rapid rate, and to this one feature more than perhaps any other is laid the present success of the school. Major Stratemeyer also insisted: upon another very radical change. No men would be accepted for training promiscuously, but every prospective candidate for instruction must prove his mechanical ability before being accepted. The course was again divided and subdivided, more specialization and less generality in instruction being the aim. New courses were added as the need for them arose and at this date many different subjects may be taken up by the students entering the department. Instead of equal amounts of theoretical and practical work a program of only 20 per cent theory and 80 per cent practice was adopted.

Late in February Washington sent Mr. Geo. E. A. Hallett, now a Major, to Kelly to re-organize the work. He had had a wide experience in the formation of courses and his experience was valuable. Under his direction the curriculum underwent other radical changes and an entire new method of operation was placed in effect.

On April 29th permission was again sought to establish a Provisional Training Battalion, in which the students of the school might be quartered, but it was not until the beginning of June that this Battalion became an actuality. Since that time the work has been thoroughly systematized and basic principles of operation established and the Air Service Mechanics' School of Kelly Field has come to be a by-words synonymous with efficiency and accuracy, known and used in every Air Service Station in the United States. It represents an investment of over \$2,000,000 and has turned out students by the thousands--students that are by this time scattered to the four corners of the earth. Of course, when the Armistice was signed and the Great War came to an end the school was naturally curtailed to a great extent, and the bright dreams of its future development ceased to be anything but the veriest of air castles, but nevertheless, during the time it was permitted to grow and expand, its officers and men have set a shining example of co-operation and efficient management which shall never die, but shall ever remain a source of pride and gratification to a grateful country which called for service and sacrifice in its hour of need and—obtained it.

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources