

FLYERS' TRAINING JUST LIKE LIFE IN GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Eighth Grade Pupils Are Moved Along to Higher Course

COLLEGE COMES AT FRONT

Best of Them Never Get Done Learning, According to Wise Old Timers

TRAINING CENTER ON ITS TOES

Western Boom Days Recalled at Mudville-in-France Where Our Aviators Are Made

Throughout the A.E.F. these are busy days—working out the final touches and putting the finishing touches on Uncle Sam's war making machine—and nowhere is the activity more marked than in the Air Service.

The first references to our aviators at the front have been made in the official communiqués during the last few days. "Our aviators brought down two hostile machines yesterday"—"our airplanes bombed the railroad station and sidings at — last night. Several direct hits —"

These statements have been modest, dignified and laconic. But they have been momentous in their significance. They tell the message that American aviators have made a beginning. They signify something done, something doing. And this spirit is reflected throughout the whole Air Service.

Real American Bustle

The American training centers in France are beehives of activity. Machines are in the air, engines are being tuned up. The flyers are flying and the ground men are working. These camps, too, signify something done, something doing. The bustle is the kind that accomplishes things—systematic, efficient, happy, American.

The United States maintains the largest aviation center in France and several smaller ones. At the biggest one most of the A.E.F. flyers get their preliminary and advanced training in the handling of aircraft, and at some of the others they learn the advanced points of the game—machine gunnery, bombing and the like.

"Learning to fly is simple," the instructors say. "Anyone who can run a Ford can run an airplane."

They mean merely to fly. But mere flying, and being a military aviator in these days, is widely different. Nearly anybody can learn in a surprisingly short time to take a machine up, make a couple of circles and a landing.

More Than Mere Flying

Mere flying may be as simple as running an automobile, but circling around over a battlefield observing for artillery with shells bursting near and hostile machines in the air or bombing, or harassing infantry with machine gun fire is much more than mere flying. The successful military aviator is a man trained high in the technique of his craft, with a whole bag of tricks that the old exhibition flyers, for instance, didn't need to know anything about.

Becoming an aviator in the A.E.F. is like going to school all over again. At the biggest training center, simple and advanced flying is taught. There are eight fields, like the eight grades of our grammar school, and the beginner starts at the first and completes his course at the eighth.

In the first grade, he runs a "grass cutter." He learns about the motor and the controls and skims around the field getting familiar with the craft. Then he goes to the second field and for the first time gets off the ground. He suits a stable, substantial, foolproof machine and makes "hops." By the time he has passed through the intermediate fields and attained the seventh and eighth grades, he is doing acrobatics in a trim, sensitive little battleplane and flying in squadron formation.

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After this he graduates from the grammar school of aviation and is ready for "high school."

At the Airmen's High School

"High school" is another training center. If the pupil is to be a bomber, he goes to bombing school; if an observer, he attends an observer's school. If he is going in for combat or chasse work, he becomes an expert on the machine gun. In any event, the aviator must be more than a mediocre machine gunner.

After "high school" comes "college"—the front. Like all students, the aviator has a lot to learn after he leaves school, and this higher knowledge he gets at his work. At the front he learns fast. One experienced aviator said the other day:

"Most people learn something new every day, but a war time aviator does better than that—he learns two or three things a day, and sometimes a whole lot more."

The largest training camp of the A.E.F.—all of them for that matter—grew quickly. Ten months ago its site was a series of grass grown fields dotted with a few wooded stretches and bisected with small gullies. It was eight to ten miles from a railroad.

Late last summer a company of Railway Engineers arrived at the nearest town on the railroad line and began to lay a track out to the projected training center. They met some obstacles in the shape of hills that they didn't bother to surmount—they simply went around—and in a few weeks finished a railroad that got where it started for even if it did go 12 miles to get nine.

Muddiest Spot in France

Then came more soldiers, mostly Air Service men, who started to work building the training center. These men will tell you that the site was the muddiest section of France last winter (anybody who was anywhere else in France last winter is entitled to sneer at this), but they worked hard and did the job.

Now the air center is a city. There are streets and rows of long barracks, Y.M.C.A. and Red Cross buildings, offices, warehouses—even a round house and a fire department. It is a duplicate of a boom town in the West. Little locomotives switch cars of freight and supplies up and down Main Street; the general merchandise store, with a Q.M. sign over the door, does a rushing business, and men bustle about in greasy overalls and work clothes as long as there is daylight.

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