



Fourth commander: Shown here with an unidentified civilian at old Lowry Field in the mid-1920s, Carlos Reavis assumed command in 1930.

The driving force . . .

The progenitor for the Colorado Air National Guard was the 120th Observation Squadron, but the person who made it a reality was Daniel F. Kearns. He, with several other World War I pilots, convinced the adjutant general that a flying squadron should be part and parcel of the Colorado National Guard. However, it was Danny Kearns who put it all together — the worker, the doer, the driving force — and brought to fruition one of the first Guard flying squadrons in the United States.

Capt. Edgar N. Schaeffer

Lt. Kearns received his flying training in 1920. By March 1921 he was commissioned a second lieutenant and rated a pilot. Transferred to Langley Field in May the same year and assigned to the 88th Aero Squadron, the lieutenant participated in Brig. Gen. William "Billy" Mitchell's famous aerial bombing of U.S. Navy vessels to prove the value of air power. Lt. Kearns bombed both the *USS San Marcus* and the *USS Alabama*, helping support air power apostle Mitchell's doctrine that a fleet of heavy bombers could "destroy an enemy's 'means of making war' by hitting his center of production." Mitchell's belief in strategic air power dictated overall U.S. air strategy in World War II and, fortunately, it was a belief shared by other members of the close-knit fraternity of between-wars Army aviators — among them George C. Kenney, Hoyt Vandenberg, Haywood S. Hansell, Carl A. "Tooney" Spaatz, Ira C. Eaker and Curtis LeMay. All were air power leaders who became, in time, commanders of one or another of the 12 separate combat air forces that Hap Arnold had set up by 1945 to fly and fight around the globe.

Kearns was one of the first enlistees in the 120th Observation Squadron and, as a master sergeant, took the flying unit's first *Jennie* to the air in 1924. The first official Colorado Air National Guard "technician" and one of the first fliers to con-

Be air-minded

If you don't follow the developments in air transportation, you are not modern and progressive.

Lt. Danny Kearns, in his Denver Post "Flying" column

Worshipping heroes

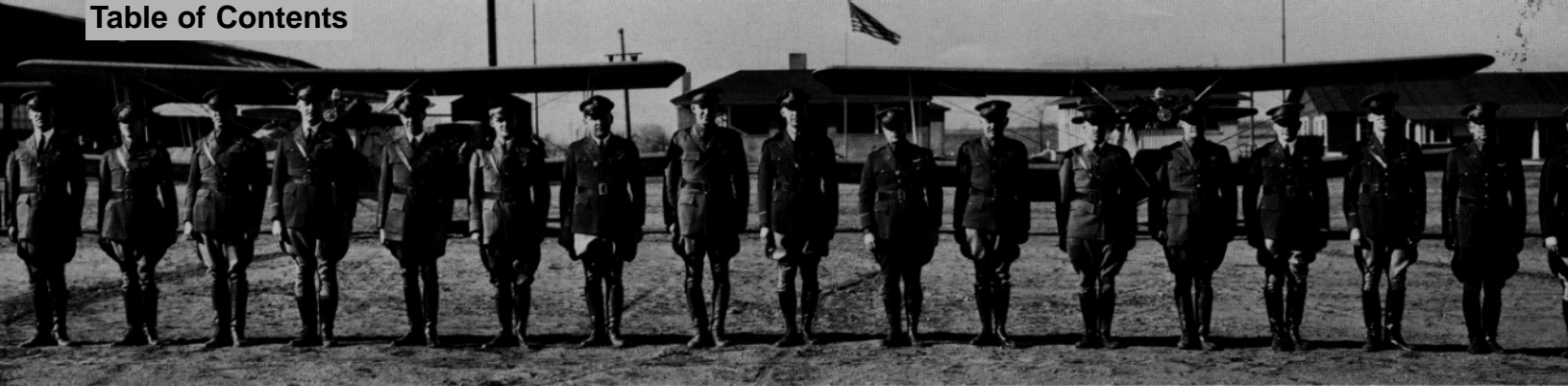
It lay in the dusty, desert prairie near the scattered, brick homes of Park Hill. The far-from-elegant steel hangars were built along the east side of Dahlia St. The floors were dirt. The roofs were painted in a large, black-and-yellow checkerboard pattern to be easily identified from the air. A row of small, white bungalows to the north of the hangars housed squadron operations. Runways did not exist. There was no control tower nor lighting for night flying, but a windsock atop a hangar showed which way the breeze was blowing. The delicate-looking biplanes would take off across the field, leaping into the wind. Many youngsters spent hours admiring the planes and their dazzling pilots in leather helmets and jackets and shiny boots. Boys in brown knickers, drooping knee socks, scuffed and dusty shoes, but wearing leather jackets and helmets with small, round, snap-on goggles, hung around waiting for the last plane to come home.

John McClure, Aurora Advocate Sentinel, Sept. 7, 1977

quer the lofty Rockies by plane, he won national acclaim for his relief mission to Silverton in 1927. He left the unit in 1929 to work for Universal Airlines in Chicago, returning several years later as an airport adviser to the Civil Works Administration in Colorado. Danny Kearns' many achievements earned him election into the Aviation Hall of Fame of the Colorado Aviation Historical Society in 1970.

Maj. William Dayton moved from the area and resigned his commission in the same month that the PT-1s arrived — May 1927. After enlisting in an officers' training camp in 1917 and serving as an instructor during World War I, Dayton had learned to fly every kind of aircraft — *Fokkers, La Peres, Newport*s and *Spads*, in addition to the training planes used in the United States. His experience in training and instruction served him and the new Colorado unit well. He left a unit rated as one of the best in the nation out of 18 other National Guard squadrons, manned by experienced pilots and an efficiently functioning ground force.

Maj. Dayton was succeeded in command by Maj. Bruce Kistler, son of one of Denver's oldest families. Kistler, after graduation from the Georgia School of Technology, had served at Kelly Field, Texas, and at Carlson Field, Fla., before coming to Colorado. At the close of the first training camp under Maj.



Proving their value: By 1929, squadron officers had proven the feasibility of "mile high" flying, won air races, made mercy missions and assisted the state in observation missions.

Kistler in June 1927, he stated that, "in four years, over 350,000 miles had been flown by the young flying squadron and their safety record was one of the best in the country."

Guard patrols during Colorado coal strikes

In the fall of 1927, the 120th was given its first opportunity to demonstrate its value to the state as an observation squadron. The unit was asked to patrol the skies over southern Colorado during a series of bloody coal strikes. Acting under direct orders from the governor, five officers and four enlisted men were ordered to Pueblo with three Douglas O-2C aircraft. Making its base in Pueblo, the detail patrolled 90 miles to the south. Through the squadron's constant observance of the region, the governor and the adjutant general were kept fully informed of mass meetings, concentrations of strikers and threatened disturbances.

For three weeks, the small detail flew one reconnaissance mission each hour over the southern coal fields. During one of those sorties, Capt. Neil T. McMillan made a low-level pass on strikers near Walsenburg. After returning to Pueblo, he found a number of bullet holes in his airplane.

The coal field disorders later spread to northern Colorado. As a result of open hostilities and bloodshed at the Columbine Mine in November, a number of Colorado National Guard units were called to active duty. The 120th Observation Squadron, operating from old Lowry Field, again flew daily reconnaissance patrols over the new area of disturbances.

On one mission Capt. McMillan and three other pilots were patrolling the area when they noticed a suspicious concentration of miners. Not too far away Army Guard troops were putting machine guns in place and forming skirmish lines. The four

Dudley "did right" Rudolph

There was a colorful guy, by the name of Ed Rudolph, who started his career as a mountie in the Canadian Cavalry before transferring to the U.S. Cavalry and later the Colorado Army Guard and the 120th Observation Squadron.

CMSgt. Lloyd "Tuck" Mestepey

pilots quickly made a bombing circle, and one by one started diving on the strikers. Although they had no ordnance to fire, they continued to make low passes and succeeded in dispersing the concentration. Their action averted what could have been a bloody fight.

A newspaper reporter covering the story wrote with typical media color of the day: "Four roaring airplanes of the Colorado National Guard swooped and zoomed, rolled, dived, turned, circled and banked over a mass meeting of 3,200 Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) leaders and striking miners at Ludlow. Flinging themselves down from dizzy heights, straight as arrows at the massed strikers, the four daring pilots of the 120th Observation Squadron straightened up and flattened out only a few scant feet above the heads of the whirling, panic-stricken crowd, who fled to burrows in panic. The roar of the

Early flyby: Maj. Kistler felt that "every additional plane in the air demonstrates the practicability and safety of flying."

"Hot damn"

I was a member of the Headquarters Battery, 70th Field Artillery Brigade, 45th Division, when I attended my first summer camp at Fort Sill, Okla. in 1929. Since the minimum age was 18 before you could be in the guard and I was 15, I fibbed about my age. I was six feet tall, so I was accepted. I'll never forget my first day in camp. We were awakened by the 158th Field Artillery Branch playing as they marched to Camp Headquarters for the raising of the flag. Later that day airplanes from Lowry Field's Observation Squadron did a fly-over. When those planes buzzed the field I thought "hot damn, ain't this somethin'." I was sold on the Guard then for sure.

Lt. Col. Jack C. Hinchsliff



... racing motors, booming through open exhausts, was just too much for the I.W.W. leaders who sought to speak, and the miners who sought to listen. The agile fled to cellars; others threw themselves on the ground. And thus, aviation history was made in Colorado Sunday."

By January 1928, the civilian confrontations had ended and the squadron was relieved from active duty. The unit had successfully accomplished its first official state mission.

Lindy visits, squadron promotes aviation

A year after making his historic solo crossing of the Atlantic, Charles Lindbergh visited Denver and the 120th Observation Squadron, making the comment in 1928 that the Guard's Lowry Field was one of the "finest equipped and maintained single-unit fields in the United States." Lindbergh's flight in the *Spirit of St. Louis* had been a triumph of spirit and science, elevating him above Hollywood stars like Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford and sports heroes like the *Sultan of Swat* Babe Ruth and heavyweight champ Jack Dempsey to the status of "ultimate" hero. His daring aviation achievement called up memories of heroic individuals of the past and gave hope to the country that the technological marvels of the era would lead to a bright future for America. Aviation had indeed arrived.

As a side bar to the military accomplishments of the 1920s, the 120th and other military flying units throughout the country played a large role in gaining public acceptance of commercial aviation in the years before regular civilian routes were established. "Every additional plane in the air is another demonstration to the public of the practicability and safety of flying," Maj. Kistler asserted in the late 1920s. "The public is looking and judging and rapidly getting into the mood to patronize aerial transportation on a large scale. I am convinced that every airplane passenger is aviation's best advertising."

Victory smiles

Victory smiles upon those who anticipate the changes in the character of war, not upon those who wait to adapt themselves after the changes occur.

Italian Air Marshall Giulio Douchet, 1928



"Lucky Lindy" and the Spirit of St. Louis: After his courageous flight in 1927, Lindbergh became the decade's "ultimate hero."

Airplane possibilities

No military man believes that aviation development will eliminate the infantry, artillery and the Navy in future wars, but most of the strategists now concede that control of the air will be a necessary preliminary to any major operation on land or sea. This nation's present aviation equipment for war purposes is but a miniature of the mighty Air Force which will be developed. It is certain that National Guard units will play an important part in this expansion. In a few years, the American public shall have been thoroughly awakened to the possibilities of the airplane, both as an instrument of war and as a transport medium of prosperous peace times.

Maj. Bruce Kistler

"One of the country's finest equipped and maintained single-unit fields": Charles Lindbergh boosted aviation awareness during his 1928 visit.





120th Photo Section



MR. SGT. J.C. CANN STE. SGT. E.A. RUDOLPH
 STE. SGT. AB. COOPER SGT. L.P. COOPER
 (10-7-34-11) (NON. COMMISSIONED OFFICERS 120th. PHOTO

Tools of the trade: 120th Observation Squadron photo section NCOs displaying their aerial photography equipment, 1934. From Left . . . SSgt. A.B. Cooper, MSgt. J.C. Cann, SSgt. E.A. Rudolph and Sgt. L.P. Cooper.

The Thirties . . . historical overview

In many ways, the impact of the stock market crash of 1929 gave new direction to the policies of the federal government. President Hoover, like many others, thought the depression was temporary and that individual initiative, rather than governmental intervention, was the quickest and safest way out. It soon became evident that it would be many years before the damage caused by excessive speculation could be repaired. It was also apparent that strong measures would be necessary to combat the Great Depression.

Unemployment rose from 10,000 in 1931 to 15,000,000 in 1932 — there were simply no jobs to be had. Businesses failed and plants closed. A national income in 1929 of \$81 billion dropped to \$41 billion in 1932. Personal savings were wiped out to meet family expenses.

In July 1932, Congress and the president yielded to the pressure and the need for emergency funds. It was little wonder that the 1932 election was a landslide for the Democrats and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Roosevelt's "New Deal" for the "forgotten man" did not specify any great panacea for the Depression. He said that he would experiment and was willing to try anything. The period begun on March 9, 1933 — referred to as the "Hundred Days" — was an era of remarkable cooperation between the legislative and executive branches of government.

Emergency measures came first. The Emergency Banking Act, Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Civilian Conservation Corps, and Agriculture Adjustment Act were all followed by long-range reforms like the Tennessee Valley Authority Act, Securities Exchange Commission and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. The "dry" era ended and Prohibition was finally dismissed as unworkable in 1933. By the spring of 1934, the "spirits" of the nation had improved even if there was no clear proof of economic recovery.

The New Deal was criticized as undermining the American system. Conservatives said that the government was destroying private enterprise through interference in all forms of business. In the election of 1936, however, Roosevelt was re-elected and there were Democratic Party gains in both houses of Congress.

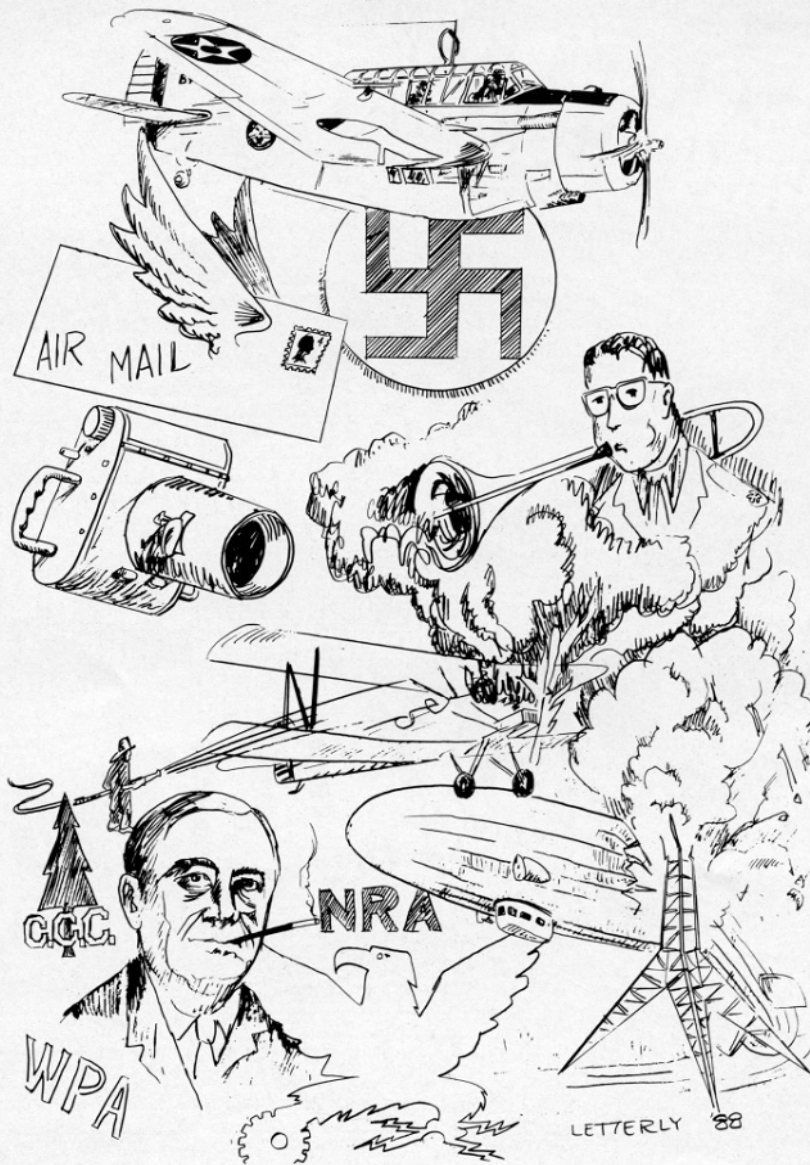
Subsequent New Deal policies attempted to help the underprivileged through the Social Security Act and the Wages and Hours Act — minimum wage and maximum hours legislation. The Works Progress Administration and the National Youth Administration helped provide jobs for millions of unemployed people. Era legislation revealed the federal government in a new role — a social agency attempting to provide economic security for its people.

The Supreme Court found many of the New Deal programs to be unconstitutional, which angered President Roosevelt. He moved to place new judges in the federal court system, desiring no men over 70 years of age sitting on the Supreme Court.

The United States was still trying to pull itself out of the worst depression in history when Communist and Nazi aggression threatened Europe and the Japanese Imperialists invaded Manchuria. With Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933, the U.S. Congress tried to minimize the possibility of America's involvement

in a war in Europe. Despite vast neutrality legislation, the Roosevelt administration moved on to prepare the nation for the impact of what became the second world war. The United States was eager for Great Britain and France to win, but it was the German invasion of the Low Countries that shocked Americans into a realization of the implications of total war.

As the '20s ended with the threat of depression, the '30s ended in the presumed knowledge of involvement in a major global conflict.



33 Are Dead or Missing and 64 Rescued As Zeppelin Explodes, Crashes in Flames

4 Councilmen Say Cranmer Hid Facts to Obtain Land

Rate Officials Assert Manager Failed to Disclose Ownership in Ordering Abandonment

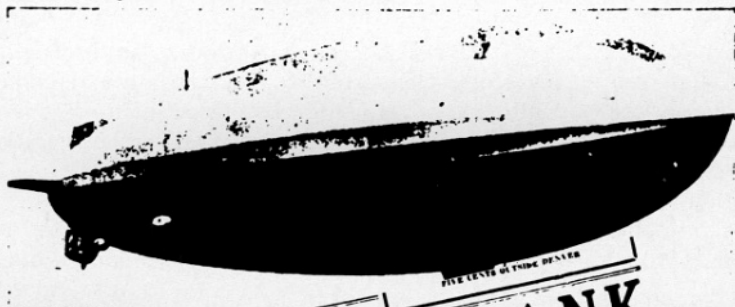
Repeal Gets Study

Check of Entire Deal Involving Property Worth \$1,000 Started

BY DICK HENRY

City Council would not have sanctioned the public land grab of valuable park front property by George E. Cranmer, manager of Gaults and improvements, had its members been adequately informed.

Flames Conquer Monarch of the Air



THE LEVEL OF INFLATE BEHAVIOR

ROOSEVELT DECREES BANK SUSPENSION THRU THURSDAY

Payment of Gold and Other Currency on Hand Stopped All Over U. S.; Clearing House Certificates

DRASTIC

Colorado Guard Fliers Conquer the Rockies



Nation's First Family Enters New Home

WILL AND WILEY FLYING HOME

Former Colorado Boy at Controls of Funeral Plane

BABY DOE DIES AT HER POST GUARDING MATCHLESS MINE

Where Baby Doe Tabor Kept Her Trust



Where Baby Doe Tabor Kept Her Trust

TWO FLYERS ON WAR GAME DUTY

VERT WYOMING RAILWAY WRECK

Colorado National Guard Aviators, Seeing Cloud-burst Destroy Bridge, Fly to Airport and Warn Road Officials.

What might have been a serious railroad wreck was averted Tuesday night by two members of the 120th observation squadron of the Colorado National Guard, flying in the storm-swept mountain mountains of Wyoming on war game duty.

The two, Lieut. Robert L. Ainsworth of 768 Colorado boulevard, and his observer, Harry A. Trail of 2231 South mission and "high tailed" to the mining street, observed a cloud-burst over the water.

From the air, the Colorado National Guard aviators saw the Colorado and Denver railroad tracks, carrying a freight train, being destroyed by a cloud-burst.

They immediately radioed their observations to the command post, and within fifteen minutes a plane was in the air.

(Turn to Page 13—Col. 3.)

Hydroplane Causes One Of His

DANNY KEARNS, OF FLYING FAME, BACK IN DENVER

Wearing the smile that won friends during his five-year residence in Denver as regular instructor of the Colorado National Guard observation squadron, Lieut. Danny Kearns stepped out of the cabin of a Thursday Air-Express passenger plane to greet old acquaintances home for a little while, said "outenanny" Kearns, who had been flying that ever conquered the Rocky mountains with an airplane, making his way to his beloved hills in one of the responsible positions of the North-western

REGULAR WAR MANEUVER TRAIN SQUADRON NATIONAL DEFENSE

Twenty-six of the Red army war birds, encamped here Saturday night, tuned their fighting ships ready to go into action Monday.

Red Army Air Base, Denver Municipal Airport, Aug. 27. Twenty-six of the Red army war birds, encamped here Saturday night, tuned their fighting ships ready to go into action Monday.

DARING NATIONAL GUARD FLYERS PROVE HIGH ALTITUDES SAFE FOR REGULAR AIR COMMERCIAL

Forestry Patrol Aids in Preserving Valuable Tracts of Timber



Forestry Patrol Aids in Preserving Valuable Tracts of Timber

WILLY POST BOY AT CONTROLS OF FUNERAL PLANE

When this photograph was not far distant for Will Rogers, cowboy humorist, and Wiley Post, controls of the ship, Rogers is crawling up

MERRY XMAS ISSUE-1939

Colorado National Guard Prepared for High Flying



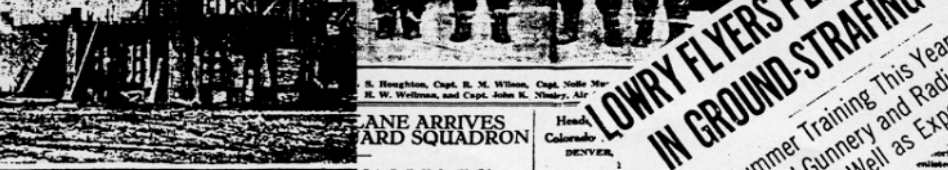
Headquarters of the Colorado National Guard, Denver, Colorado

HUGE NATIONAL GUARD AIRPLANE HANGAR IS NEARING COMPLETION

Department orders the 120th in performing Field Training addition to increased Army increased activities around both on the ground and in the air.

LOWRY FLYERS PEPPER TARGETS IN GROUND-STRAFING PRACTICE

Annual Summer Training This Year Includes Aerial Gunnery and Radio Communication as Well as Expert Flying



Huge National Guard Airplane Hangar is Nearing Completion

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Mission ready: Photo section commander 1st. Lt. Ray Wilson and MSgt. Cann prepared for a reconnaissance mission in their Douglas observation aircraft, 1931.

The Thirties

The years 1927 through 1934 witnessed many improvements in the 120th Observation Squadron. The underpowered *Jennies* had been replaced and the unit's PT-1s were transferred to other stations. The squadron's two Douglas O-2Cs were damaged beyond repair — washed out — during cross-country flights. Replacing them were O-2H observation aircraft received from the Douglas factory at Santa Monica, Calif., in early 1928. The new Douglas machines, which could fly at 140 miles per hour, were equipped with a 400-horsepower, 12-cylinder Liberty engine that was correctly designed for observation purposes. The new observation aircraft also had wheel brakes, allowing them to land on short fields. Able to be easily converted for combat, the O-2Hs cost \$18,000 each.

The O-2Hs were flown from California by Capt. Floyd N. Shumaker, Capt. Lewis W. Goss and Lt. Danny Kearns. Flying in battle formation, the pilots in their new aircraft — carrying 17 brand new flying suits — were met by the squadron when they landed at Lowry Field. "Wonderful ship," said Kearns as he climbed out of the cockpit after the 11-hour trip. "The most perfect performer I have ever flown." In spite of Kearns' glowing endorsement, the O-2Hs' water-cooled Liberty engines left much to be desired in altitudes where the boiling point of water

was about equal to the efficient operating heat of the engines. For every 1,000 feet elevation above sea level water boils at about 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit lower temperature. At 14,000 feet, a typical altitude for crossing one of Colorado's mountain ranges, water in the Liberty engine boiled at 187 degrees. Unacceptable.

Two Consolidated O-17s, suited for high-altitude maneuverability, had been accepted by the squadron in 1930 and additional O-2Hs were acquired in 1931. In 1933 three Douglas O-38s and an O-38E were received from other units. The O-38s contained the 134 radio set, a great improvement to the squadron's communications capabilities. The Douglas-type airplanes were equipped for either photographic work or instrument flying and all could be adapted with aerial machine guns and bombing racks.

Major Reavis assumes command

After commanding the 120th Observation Squadron for over three years, Maj. Bruce Kistler died in August 1930 after a brief illness. The adjutant general of Colorado, Col. Paul P. Newlon, paid tribute to Maj. Kistler's outstanding service to his native state:

Maj. Bruce Kistler

His gift of organizing and directing others for greater service gave the organization added impetus — and, at the time of his death, not one unit of aviation in the United States stood higher than the one he commanded.

Col. Paul P. Newton

Capt. Carlos Reavis was promoted to major and assumed command of the squadron after Kistler's death. Maj. Reavis and his wife were significant contributors to early aviation in Colorado. For a number of years the major operated an air service in Denver. As the national director of the Women's Aviation Society, Mrs. Reavis helped organize women's aviation throughout the state and country. Acquaintances like Amelia Earhart occasionally addressed the local Aviation Society chapter in Denver.

Summer camps

Summer camp was conducted at old Lowry Field in 1930 and



This field is small, use it all: Advice to squadron fliers at old Lowry Field. Acquired in 1933, the O-38s taking off in the foreground were equipped for photography needs but could be adapted to fit a combat role as well.

Aviation Perspective

The doctrine of strategic bombardment, which Billy Mitchell had preached in the 1920s, was still on the minds of many Air Corps leaders in the early 1930s. Men such as Maj. Hugh Knerr, commander of the Second Bombardment Group, and Lt. Col. Clarence Culver, commander of the Second Bombardment Wing, persisted in their efforts to persuade the Army to purchase bombers capable of accomplishing the doctrine.

The bomber to meet those expectations would be a multi-engine aircraft capable of carrying a 2,000-pound payload over a range of 1,200 miles at a speed of 200 miles per hour or better. All but one of the manufacturers competing for this contract assumed the Air Corps wanted another twin-engine bomber. Boeing decided to gamble and designed a four-engine bomber — the B-17. It had a wing span of 103 feet, a service ceiling of 30,000 feet, could carry a load of 2,500 pounds over a distance of 2,260 miles, and had a top speed of 250 miles per hour. It was the plane the Air Corps

had dreamed of bringing into the inventory. But the Army purchased only a few B-17s, electing to go with the less expensive twin-engine Douglas B-18 in quantity.

The struggle for independence from the Army surfaced again in 1934. A series of training crashes and the dismal failure of the Air Corps to carry airmail resulted in a committee to study all aspects of military aviation. From this board came the recommendation to create a General Headquarters Air Force and in late December 1934 this was done. For the first time a centrally controlled strike force was under the control of a flier, Brig. Gen. Frank Andrews.

In 1938, in response to Hitler's growing power in Europe and the rise of the Japanese empire in the Far East, the United States began to rearm. With this came rapid expansion. The deficiencies of the General Headquarters Air Force became more apparent and in the 1940s the concept of the Army Air Forces was born.



Squadron officers: By mid-1932, the Colorado cougar adorned the unit's O-2H aircraft.

1931. At their encampment in 1930, 120th pilots flew armed aircraft in strafing runs for the first time. Thirteen squadron pilots fired 400 rounds each at 10-foot-by-6-foot canvas-framed ground targets propped up like signboards. With propeller blades whirling in front of the gun muzzle, aircraft machine guns were timed to shoot twice for each revolution. A *Denver Post* newspaper reporter observed the action: "Buzzing like a big blue fly with yellow wings, a plane circles above a prairie knoll 12 miles east of Lowry Field. Suddenly it dives upon a propped up square of canvas. Jets of yellow dust spurt up around the target like splashes of muddy water."

Future flight training saw "dog fights" between squadron aircraft . . . diving, climbing and banking to gain the most advantageous position for firing a machine-gun camera, mounted forward on the plane and operated by an observer from a turret in the rear cockpit. At the same 1930 encampment, pilots participated in night-flying maneuvers for the first time. By 1931, Colorado Guard planes had flown over 10,000 hours and nearly 1 million miles — a distance equivalent to about 40 times around the earth at the equator.

During the years 1932 and 1933, squadron annual field training camps were held at Fort Sill, Okla., operating with other units of the 45th Division. Participation in divisional command post exercises and maneuvers, artillery surveillance and adjustment missions were the unit's principal training objectives. In May 1931, a squadron detachment with five airplanes participated in an extensive Air Corps maneuver and demonstration under the 22nd Provisional Observation Wing at Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio. In addition to regular Army aviation units, 99 airplanes representing 18 National Guard squadrons took part in the exercise. The Colorado detachment received very favorable comments on its high degree of efficiency.

Colorado gets its cougar

The secretary of war, on June 17, 1932, approved a design to be painted on all airplanes of the 120th Observation Squadron as the official insignia or marking of the squadron. Given in the language of heraldry, the official description of the insignia read: "On a besant and within an annulet azure lies a mountain lion's face proper. The background and border are in the colors of the Air Corps. The mountain lion is known for his fighting qualities, keen observation and agility." The insignia was designed by 1st Lt. Floyd E. Welsh, 120th Observation Squadron, and was intended to exemplify the squadron's primary duty of observation as well as its fighting spirit.



120th insignia: The cougar has represented the COANG fighting spirit for more than five decades.

In January 1934, Lt. Col. Carlos Reavis was assigned to the staff of the 45th Air Division. Succeeding him as commander of the squadron was Capt. Virgil Stone, subsequently promoted to major. The squadron's first instructor, Capt. Shumaker, had been succeeded by 1st Lt. L.V. Beau in 1928. Capt. Myron

The airplane of yesterday

We made them of tin, of pine and bamboo,
We tied them with string, we stuck them with glue.
We hammered them out in various ways,
We patched them together with strings and stays.
Where knowledge is guess work, guesses must serve,
And we know that to fly, the wings must curve.
So we turned out the curves as we turned out the rest,
Products of chance, performance unguessed.

We made out designs with chart and stencil,
With foot rule, paper and bits of lead pencil.
We turned out the camber and angles at will,
And knew that the factor of safety was nil.
But for all the defects of those wicked old hacks,
We flew and survived the inevitable cracks.
And those who performed on those ships of the past,
Have gone to their rest, all famous at last.

And for all the tacks, the strings and the glue,
They answered our purpose, the old crates flew!
They answered our purpose, and what more can we say,
They made the game what it is today.

As we ride the new ships constructed to please,
And lounge in upholstery in safety and ease.
Let us pause for a moment and toast while we may,
Those flimsy, rickety crates . . . the ships of yesterday.

Lt. Art Pierce
Minnesota ANG



Front Range formation: Acquired in 1928, the unit's Douglas O-2Hs had difficulty flying at high altitudes.

Wood, in 1933, and 1st Lt. Norman D. Brophy in 1934 followed as squadron instructors. The unit's 1934 roster included the following officers:

45th Division Aviation Colorado National Guard

Maj. Virgil D. Stone, Colorado National Guard, Commanding

120th Observation Squadron

Headquarters Section:

Virgil D. Stone, Maj., Commanding
William E. Hunter, 1st Lt., Adjutant

Operations Section:

Charles J. La Gue, Capt., Operations Officer
Albert J. Boot, Jr., 1st Lt., Intelligence Officer

Supply Section:

William B. Ogle, 2nd Lt., Supply Officer

Communications Section:

Harrison W. Wellman, Jr., 1st Lt., Communications Officer

Armament Section:

Henry S. Houghton, 2nd Lt., Armament Officer

Engineering Officer:

Raymond M. Wilson, 1st Lt., Engineering Officer

Commander Flight A:

Charles W. France, Capt.

Commander Flight B:

Harley H. Montague, Capt.

Flight Assignments: Flight A

Charles W. France, Capt., Commanding
Charles J. La Gue, Capt.
Raymond M. Wilson, 1st Lt.
Floyd E. Welsh, 1st Lt.
John D. Hissong, 1st Lt.
Virgil W. Vaughan, 1st Lt.
Harold Montee, 1st Lt.
Harold L. Baird, 2nd Lt.
William B. Ogle, 2nd Lt.

Flight B

Harley H. Montague, Capt., Commanding
Neil T. McMillian, Capt.
Cecil H. Braddick, Capt.
William H. Hunter, 1st Lt.
Albert J. Boot, 1st Lt.
Harrison W. Wellman, Jr., 1st Lt.
George E. Batty, 2nd Lt.
Henry S. Houghton, 2nd Lt.

120th Photo Section

Homer G. Sweet, 1st Lt., Commanding

Medical Department Detachment

Nolie Murney, Capt., Medical Corps

Drill duty

I joined the 120th Observation Squadron in March 1931. My most vivid memories are of my first drill periods, every Sunday for one-and-a-half hours only. Being in the engineering section, I was put on advanced duty, which meant we had to be out early enough in the morning to get the airplanes out on the line. We flew Douglas O-2Hs with 12-cylinder, V-type, liquid-cooled engines, that had to be filled with water before the regular drill periods and after the flying missions. Those of us who had the duty for that weekend had to drain the cooling systems and put the airplanes back into the hangars.

MSgt. Joseph A. Bahmeier

Airmail service

In February 1934, airmail service was transferred from commercial airlines to the Army Air Corps. A Senate investigating committee had charged that the U.S. Post Office had illegally favored large, influential airlines with lucrative mail routes and recommended that the federal government cancel all the contracts. President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued the cancellation order on Feb. 9, 1934, and instructed Maj. Gen. Benjamin Foulois, commander of the Army Air Corps, to order his military fliers to step in and carry the mail.

Col. Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, supervisor for the western section of the airmail service in the 8th Corps area, ordered all planes in the 45th Division Air Service, including those of the 120th Observation Squadron, to be placed at the disposal of the Army. Military mechanics hurriedly worked to adapt their various pursuit planes, bombers and observation craft for mail duty. The Air Corps started flying the mail 10 days later. Although the planes were flown by active duty Army pilots, maintenance was performed by National Guard caretakers. Within a short period, one of Colorado's O-38E aircraft was involved in airmail service.

The Air Corps was operating under severe handicaps. Few craft were fitted with instruments more sophisticated than

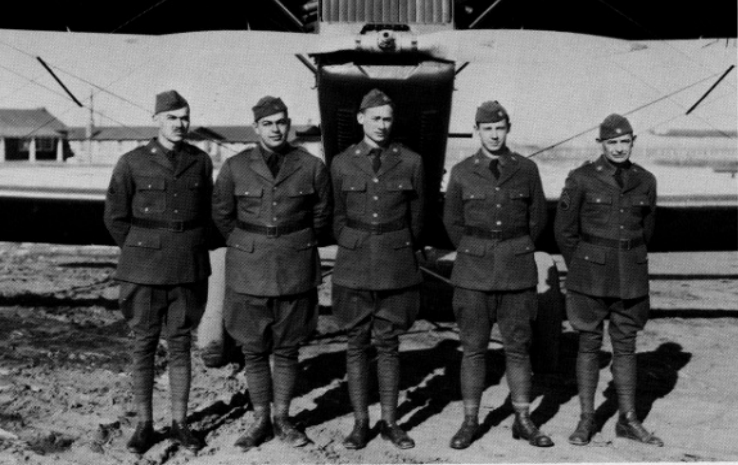


1st Lt. Beau

The dumbbell

A bronzed dumbbell, inscribed with the culprit's name, was awarded to the squadron pilot who made the dumbest error in flight. It was kept until someone else made an equally glaring mistake. 1st Lt. L.V. Beau, Jr., Army adviser to the 120th, landed in the wrong field near Montrose in 1930. He was one of the first recipients of this early, dubious achievement award. The lieutenant retired from the regular Air Force in 1955 as a major general.

Maj. Gen. Joe C. Moffitt



Chanute Field graduates: Many squadron members became instructors themselves during World War II a decade later.

It was a great period

I joined in October 1933, back when enlisted uniforms had wrapped puttees and the officers wore cavalry boots and carried swords. Yes, things were sure different in those pre-war days: the squadron requested the Division shoulder patch be changed from the American Indian thunderbird symbol, because it resembled Hitler's swastika; since our bugler played trumpet in a Denver band, all of us enjoyed a bit of "swing" in the bugle calls — all of us but the general's staff, that is; there was also the day, in high winds, when Capt. Ray Wilson flew, literally, backwards across the field. It was a great period. When we weren't confined too much by the Civilian Aviation Board or the FAA, we could go out on a warm summer evening and, after trimming the airplane, just float along and enjoy the peace and lights below or maybe circle a night baseball game at some Colorado town.

John Fellows

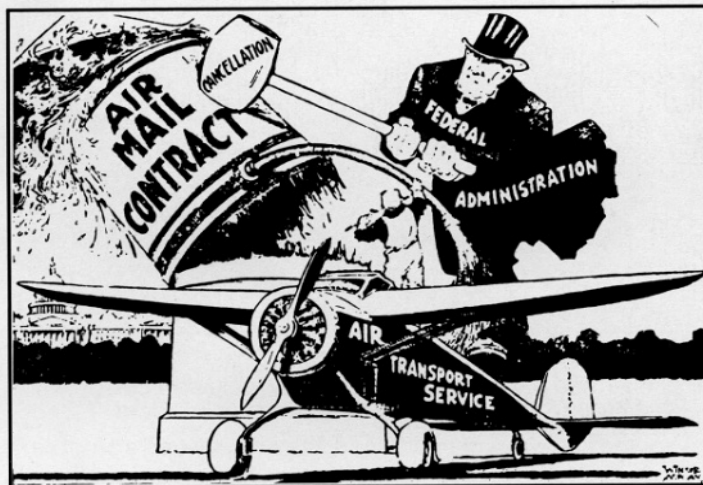
those in the Post Office's de Havillands of a decade earlier. Moreover, military tactics called for aircraft to be deployed almost exclusively during daylight hours, in relatively fair weather. As a consequence, most Army pilots had only the sketchiest acquaintance with either night flying or instrument flight, and both were essential to get the mail through in mid-winter.

The Army's first week on the mail routes was an ordeal for everyone involved. Capt. Ira C. Eaker, given command of the San Diego-Los Angeles-Salt Lake City route by Western Zone Chief Col. Arnold, was stunned to discover mail loads were much heavier than the Post Office claimed. "The stamp collectors were mainly responsible," Eaker recalled later. "The single-seat airplanes I had could carry about 50 pounds of mail, and the first day's load was 1,400 pounds." Arnold gave him permission to use a B-2 bomber, which could carry 2,000 pounds, but Eaker was the only pilot in his command who could

Express mail

There was a message pick-up procedure then: two tall poles with a cable stretched between them and the end of the loop fastened to a message pouch on the ground. The plane would pick this gear up with a hook. The pilot had to be a good flier, as well as a little lucky.

Robert Lee

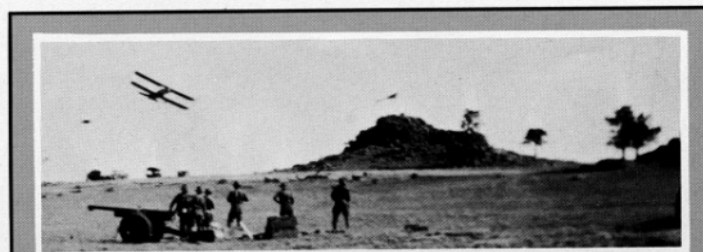


Civilian airmail contracts canceled: *Washington Herald* cartoon, February 1934.

fly a bomber. "I flew every trip that first week," he said. "I only took my clothes off to take a bath." Both Arnold and Eaker would gain renown in World War II, Arnold as head of the Army Air Forces and Eaker as commander of the Eighth Air Force.

The weather throughout much of the country remained foul, and with beacons now 10 to 15 miles apart on all mail routes, Army pilots were told to come down at the nearest emergency field if they did not have beacon-to-beacon visibility and a ceiling of at least 500 feet. Then, on Feb. 22, the Air Corps suffered its first fatality while actually carrying the mail: Lt. Durward O. Lowry crashed in dense fog while flying from Chicago to Cleveland. The deaths of six pilots by the end of the Army's first official week of mail-carrying switched the focus of the debate over the president's controversial decision from alleged contract irregularities to the Army Air Corps' own inadequacies.

Brig. Gen. Oscar Westover, the Army officer in charge of the airmail mission, blamed the misfortune on the haste with which the men were sent into action. "When you consider how the job was dumped in our laps, and how little warning we had," he



Buzzing the Cavalry: Camp George West parade ground, early 1930s.

A horse soldier remembers

I was a staff sergeant in the 117th Cavalry. National Guard airmen (flying de Havillands) strafed us repeatedly, raising hell with our mounts. There were some real hell-raisers in that observation unit. For fun, the pilots would buzz the Camp (George) West parade ground . . . especially if a certain high-ranking officer was exercising his horse at the time.

Robert Lee

Early trip in the Guard

The uniform of the day (1931) consisted of wool shirts and khaki breeches with wool-wrap leggings. The leggings were hard to wrap and harder yet to keep up. When we marched the leggings would come loose and drag behind, where they would get stepped on, tripping up the wearer as a consequence.

MSgt. Joseph A. Bahmeier

said, "the men have done exceptionally well, particularly with our present equipment."

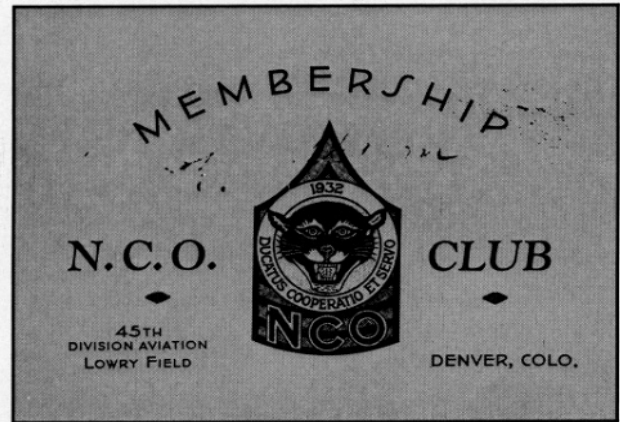
After the first week of operations, the Army issued a strict set of safety orders. They prohibited planes without radios or navigational devices from flying at night, banned flights in icing conditions and held ground supervisors responsible for thorough inspections prior to takeoff. These new rules had the intended effect: there were a few minor mishaps and narrow escapes during the second week, but there were no deaths and the clamorous opposition subsided somewhat.

On the mail routes, there was even a light moment or two. One pilot took off resolutely into the night while his mail sacks still sat on the field; another flew a round trip and discovered at its end that he had delivered his mail back to its point of origin. But the most mortified pilot was undoubtedly the one who loaded his laundry bag in with his mail sacks and passed it along to the pilot flying the next leg. The laundry was later returned with a bill for \$55 postage due.

Through it all, morale remained remarkably high, despite conditions that included danger, inadequate equipment and a shortage of operating funds. The buoyant morale may have had something to do with a superabundance of what the young pilots liked best — flying time. "I haven't had so much fun since I've been in the Air Corps," one flier said. "There was so much hostility in the press, the accidents and dangers were magni-



Uniform of the day: Kenny Leman, Joe Moffitt, Joe Bahmeier, Fred Gray and Rothby Saunders.



First NCO club card: Issued to Joe Moffitt, 1932.

fied so," Ira Eaker recalled, "that we thought it would have a negative effect on morale. Instead, it had the opposite effect: it made the pilots mad, and they tried that much harder."

President Roosevelt, under increasing pressure to act, issued a directive suspending mail flights except when routes and weather conditions would allow for accident-free flying. Gen. Foulois thereupon halted all airmail flights until the Army could regroup.

The stand-down proved beneficial: Improved equipment,

Dr. Mumey

The early squadron's flight surgeon was Nolie "Doc" Mumey, a graduate from the Brooks Field Medical Course and a qualified pilot, who had soloed in 1925. Besides being a top-notch surgeon, he was a specialist at ground looping the O-19E. Under his supervision — following strict regulations — every flier was examined twice a year. Dr. Mumey was well known for his aviation medicine achievements. Among his contributions was the development of the portable, depth-perception box used by World War II flight surgeons. Mumey, who was also associated with Continental Airlines from its beginnings, was one of several early Colorado Guard aviators elected to the Colorado Aviation Historical Society's "Aviation Hall of Fame."

I personally remember Doc Mumey as the flight surgeon who said, "shovel it in at breakfast because that's your best meal." He performed an emergency appendectomy on me using a local anesthetic, even showing me my own appendix before he sewed me back up. Now the scar is hardly noticeable.

SMSgt. Stan Morrison



"Doc" Mumey



Officers Club: Squadron officers, 1933. Top . . . Sweet, Montee, Mumey, Ogel, Braddick; Middle . . . Wilson, Wood, Welch, Hunter, Wellman; Bottom . . . Montague, Reavis, unidentified and Stone.



Aviation pioneers: Left . . . Famed solo aviatrix Amelia Earhart, at Denver Municipal Airport. Right . . . Maj. Gen. Benjamin Foulois with Brig. Gen. Moffitt and Col. Williams, 1950s. First Signal Corps pilot Foulois learned to fly from the Wright Brothers.



Dapper leader: Lt. Stanford W. Gregory (1934).

better weather and the accumulation of experience all contributed to a greatly improved performance, and Army pilots began flying the mail as routinely as had their counterparts in the civilian airlines. Even so, the president and his postal officials realized the commercial air carriers needed mail revenues to help maintain a healthy air transport system. The mail contracts were once more put up for bids from the airlines, and Army fliers made their final postal runs on May 7, 1934. The end of the Army aviators' 78-day hitch as aerial postmen returned mail-toting to its pre-crisis status as a job for passenger-carrying airliners.

Duties continue, O-19s arrive

It was during this same period, while the Colorado Guard was participating in the airmail service, that paid training assemblies were reduced by 25 percent, although the number



Wayne Carlton



Monkey on their back

An incident I remember was our train trip to Fort Sill, Okla. in 1933. We had a mascot — a monkey named Cleo — who stayed in the baggage car. Cleo swung on the emergency cable several times, checking and almost stopping the train. Cleo also loved watermelon and ate it with gusto, but it didn't agree with his stomach. Several of the gang had a mess on their backs after carrying Cleo on their shoulders.

MSgt. Joseph A. Bahmeier



24th Division Aviation NCOs: Bottom, left to right . . . Empy, Parrish, Bahmeier, Bergan, Rupe, Kerbel, Burnell, Wilhof, Pischatte, Moffitt, Rudolph, Mike the dog, Morrison, Anderson, Fiori, Cooper, Cann; Top, left to right . . . Saunders, De Savero, Lauck, Castetter, Sumners, Sr., King, Buckbee, Sumners, Jr., Ludwig, Thatcher, Hess, unidentified, Lauck, Smith, Metzger, Godow and McGrew, 1939.

of drills remained the same. The loyalty of these citizen-soldiers was so great that they donated much of their own time in order to acquire the normal number of drills to maintain currency. Pilots new to the unit were sent to Randolph Field, Texas, for a year's training — equivalent to 350 hours in the air — with all expenses paid, including room, board and clothing . . . plus the tidy sum of \$75 a month.

By the time the 120th Observation Squadron entered its second decade of existence, it had grown into a proficient military unit, making huge progress in military flying and high-altitude aviation. Old Lowry Field on the east side of Denver evolved into a fully functional operating base. The squadron had practically doubled in size from its earliest days. The unit's O-2Hs, O-17s and O-38s were an immeasurable improvement over the *Jennie*, and future planes would provide even greater flying capabilities.

In 1935 the 120th received the Thomas Morris O-19, a two-

seat, 450-horsepower, open-cockpit aircraft. The airplane had a bigger engine, a corrugated metal fuselage, and more power than any aircraft the men had experienced. Unfortunately, the first O-19 received was destined for the junk pile. As Warrant Officer Sam T. McGrew, then a buck sergeant, recalled:

Short story

I was standing on the steps of the headquarters building at Lowry Field when the first O-19 touched down. I turned to a fellow soldier and had started to say, "Pretty airplane . . ." At that precise moment, the plane ground looped and crashed, completely washing it out. I finished my sentence, ". . . wasn't it!"

Sgt. Samuel T. McGrew



New hangar, new home: Servicing the first aircraft after moving to Denver Municipal Airport in early 1938. The new hangar was the nation's second largest NG aircraft facility.

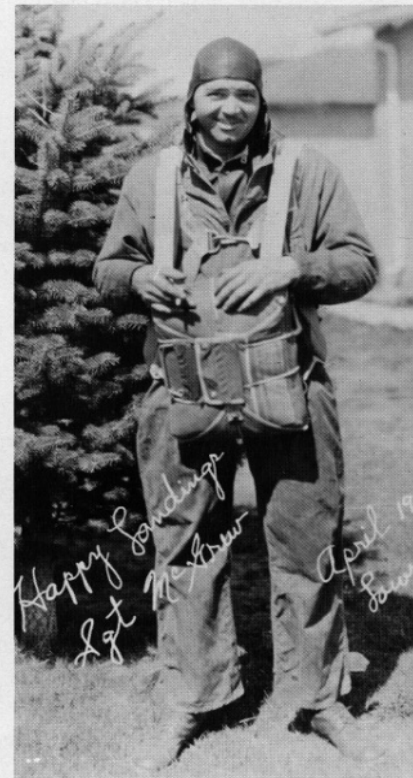


Lt. Ray Wilson

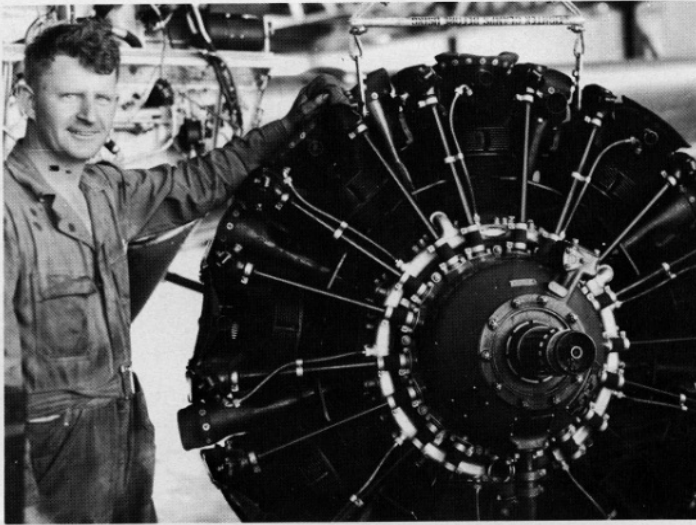
Big pay

Since I was in desperate need of additional money to finance my flight training, I asked Mr. Ray Wilson for a job at the airport during my summer vacation from high school. He was (a captain) in the 120th Observation Squadron, too. That summer I earned four hours of flying time per month and \$30 cash. It was my first job in aviation, and even though it was hard work, I loved every minute of it. I could now eat, breathe and sleep aviation. It was because of this break that I became the youngest flight instructor in the Denver area.

Claude E. Owen



Sam McGrew: At old Lowry Field, 1936.



O-47 engine change: Future Colorado Adjutant General Joe Moffitt in the Denver Municipal Airport hangar, 1938.

Flying "farm boy" Moffitt

Like a lot of farm kids who grew up in the post-World War I era, Joe C. Moffitt wanted to fly. He had only to look into the skies from his dad's farm and see some of the fragile National Guard biplanes in the air. His father, the late Robert R. Moffitt, farmed sugar beets, wheat and corn on land that now is the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, northeast of Denver. Moffitt, born March 12, 1911, was only 13 when the squadron uncrated its first airplane, the vastly underpowered — but legendary, Curtiss *Jennie*. Moffitt showed up one day in 1932 at the observation squadron to enlist. He was 21. He wanted to fly. He was willing to work, he said, in exchange for some flying lessons. It was a deal and he became an aircraft mechanic. Ray Wilson taught him to fly at the Web Flying School at East 46th Ave. and Colorado Blvd.

William Logan, Rocky Mountain News

Early pranks

My first meeting with our General Moffitt was when he joined in 1932. We spent many enjoyable days as recruits, working and camping together and becoming buddies. Our off-duty hours were spent with some pranks, such as giving "hot foots," putting hands of sleeping airmen in warm water or hoisting a bed (that was occupied) off the floor in the hangar.

MSgt. Joseph A. Bahmeier

The "Battle of Cheyenne"

Squadron aircraft played an important role in the 1936 summer encampment war game called the "Battle of Cheyenne." Flying over the broad mountain tops of Wyoming's Medicine Bow National Forest, in their first simulated combat test, Army warbirds scouted the heavily wooded mountain region 30 miles west of Cheyenne. Their objective was to help Colorado Brig. Gen. William Guthner's "Red" Army in land maneuvers against an opposing "Blue" Army from Wyoming. Flying Martin bombers and fast combat and attack aircraft, the Red airmen also staged air attacks against the Blue team commanded by Col. Ray C. Hill of Fort Francis E. Warren.

Red Army aircraft "bombed" blacked-out Cheyenne during

air raids called "one of the most thrilling and spectacular maneuvers ever attempted in any U.S. Army war game," according to *Denver Post* staff correspondent Jack Carberry. "Had the bombs been real, they would have destroyed the Wyoming state capital and the Cheyenne railroad station . . . pouring theoretical death and destruction on the city," said Carberry. Unfortunately, as the exercise continued, the Blue team's eventual high mountain position could not be penetrated and the Colorado Red Army was defeated.

A high point in the exercise was the averting of a serious railroad wreck due to the eagle-eyed observations of two Colorado National Guard pilots. On a weather scouting mission, Lt. Robert Ainsworth and his observer, Lt. Harley Teall, spotted a cloudburst from the air and saw water sweep over the Colorado & Southern Railway Company tracks, destroying a bridge and right-of-way section. After coordinating with Capt. Bonfils, who was airborne in the vicinity, the pilots flew to Cheyenne, landed and telephoned railroad officials . . . thus stopping a freight train due over the damaged railway in 15 minutes.

Squadron moves to Denver Municipal Airport

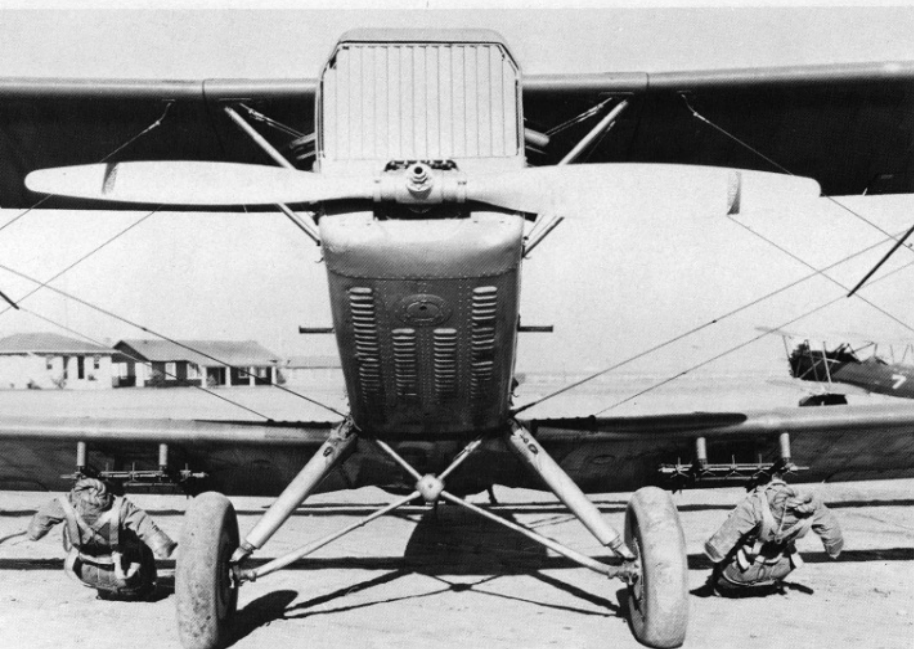
During the latter part of 1937, the name Lowry Field was transferred from the National Guard squadron to the Army Air Corps Technical School, then being established at a site near East Sixth Avenue and Quebec Street in Denver. In February 1938, the 120th ceased operations at old Lowry Field and moved to new and larger quarters at the Denver Municipal Airport (now Stapleton International Airport). The only identifiable object remaining on the property of the original Lowry Field today is the flagpole that was in front of the headquarters building. A new hangar for the Guard had recently been completed at Denver Municipal as a Works Project Administration project. The structure, the second largest National Guard hangar in the United States, would be able to accommodate up to 20 observation airplanes. Approximately 5,300 square yards of concrete apron was added in front of the hangar. The new field became the stopping point for many more cross-country flights.

The move to Denver Municipal was necessary because of

Train-saving observation

One instant it was black, then the clouds just dropped into a sort of egg-shaped formation 2,000 yards across and two miles long. The water burst as though some angry rain-god had tilted up a gigantic bucket, spilling water over everything. We radioed Capt. Bonfils and flew for all we were worth to the Cheyenne Municipal Airport. The ceiling was zero-minus, but we got down and Teall ran to a phone and informed the railroad that its tracks were gone.

Lt. Robert Ainsworth



Heads-up dummy: Squadron dummies in place for parachute testing on O-2H aircraft at old Lowry Field, 1930 (left); Fred Schaefer between "Amos" and "Andy."

the assignment of O-47 aircraft. The new aircraft would not fit in the old field's hangars and the short strip was unsuitable for landings. Also, the population of Denver was slowly moving to the east, surrounding old Lowry Field . . . an encroachment scenario that would repeat itself several more times in the history of the Colorado Air National Guard. The new hangar incorporated administrative, photographic, engineering and radio communications offices and a classroom for the 45th Division Aviation. Denver Mayor Benjamin F. Stapleton and Airport Manager James Brownlow agreed to Air Corps requests for help and, pending completion of its own hangars at the new Lowry Field, the Army Air Corps Technical School used the Guard hangar to house its airplanes as well as serve as a flying training center.

During the spring of 1938, in a controversial resignation revolving around the use of state money to erect a hangar on land to which the state did not hold title, Maj. Virgil Stone left the Colorado National Guard and Capt. Frederick Bonfils was appointed the new commander and promoted to major. Maj. Bonfils, like many of the squadron's early aviators, laid claim to significant achievements in the civilian community. At the time of his selection, Bonfils was business manager of the *Denver Post*. There was some conjecture that Adjutant General Alphonse P. Ardourel chose Bonfils in a desire to improve relations with the influential newspaper. Bonfils, a West Point graduate, had served overseas during World War I with the 4th Division.

First ride

I remember Major Hunter. He was the wrestling coach, and my history teacher, at the old Manual High School in Denver. He gave me my first airplane ride in 1933 and brought me into the Guard at the same time. That was a pretty big deal back then. I would have joined the French Foreign Legion if they had been kind enough to give me an aircraft ride.

Maj. Harry Byma

That dummy's dead!

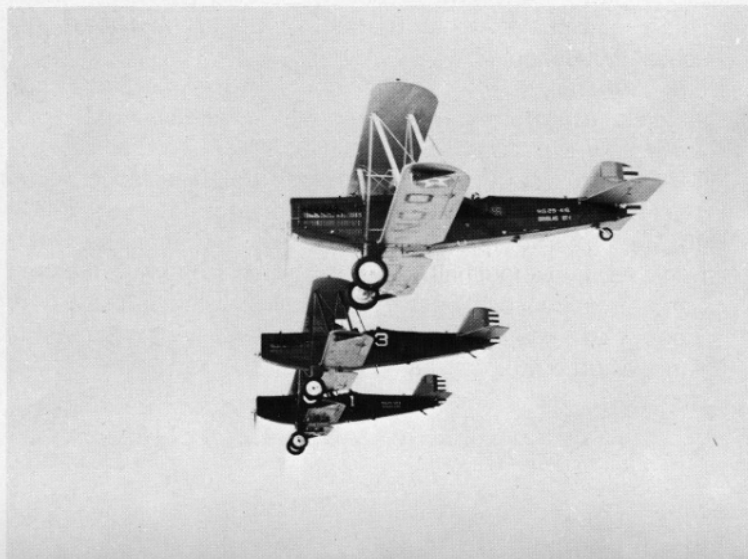
We tested our parachutes periodically by fastening them on what we called the dummy — a bundle of ropes similar in size to an average man's torso, with protruding stubs representing arms and legs. We used a 1936 ambulance as a chase vehicle to go out and pick up the dummy and parachute after a drop. We drove into a farmer's yard after one drop. The farmer came running out to us, yelling "It's no use calling the medics, he hasn't moved since he hit the ground."

MSgt. Joseph A. Bahmeier

Fire claims old aircraft

During the fall of their first year at Denver Municipal, the squadron suffered considerable loss of aircraft. Four of the seven remaining O-19s still carried in the 120th inventory were parked on the flight line when a disastrous fire struck. Although

They conquered the Rockies: Douglas BT-1s in formation near Denver, 1934.





Boise summer encampment: Top row, left to right . . . Swink, Sebree, Wilson, Williams, Bent, unidentified, Fackerel, Thompson, Bonfils, Ainsworth, Gregory, Jamillier, Teal, Sweet, Schlicker, Fellows; Bottom, left to right . . . Nissley, Mumeey, Stark, Williams and Houghton (1939).

the airplanes were in the process of being surveyed for disposition action, they had to be preflighted several times a week to insure flight readiness. Crew chiefs ran the engines up to full power, checking the magnetos and flight controls to ensure the airplanes were operational. Loyd H. Summers, Jr. started the first airplane on the line and, after warming it up, cut the engine and started to return to the hangar. When Summers was about halfway there, Joe Bahmeier, who was refueling another aircraft, yelled that dreadful word . . . *Fire!*

The first O-19 had indeed caught fire, due possibly to a hot spark from its exhaust stack. Excessive winds quickly spread the fire to the fabric-covered second airplane. In order to save a brand new O-47 parked at the end of the line, hangar chief Jack Burnell and crew chief Stan Morrison rushed a tow vehicle onto the runway to pull the O-47 out of the way. The leap-frogging fire was finally stopped, but not before all four O-19s were lost. In a matter of minutes, disposition action on many of the unit's old aircraft had rapidly taken place.

Rising Axis threat increases Air Corps funding

Stringent military budgets throughout the 1920s and early 1930s kept the Air Corps short of airplanes, personnel and often, fuel. The American public, repelled by World War I, had become anti-military and isolationist. Even as late as 1938 the Air Corps was "practically non-existent when compared with the large air fleets then being constructed by Germany, Italy and Japan" — according to the man who later became its wartime chief, General Arnold. The 1938 Air Corps could boast only some 19,000 men.

In response that year, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, alarmed both by Adolf Hitler's rearmed Germany and a Japan whose ruling military clique had already invaded China, urged Congress to vote increased funds for defense. Much of the money appropriated in 1938 went to enlarge the Navy, but in 1939, after further pleas by the president, Congress passed bills allocating about half the year's military budget — the then gargantuan sum of \$300 million — to the Army Air Corps. The money was badly needed. The Air Corps, like the Army of which it remained a branch, had been starved for funds for two decades.

Gunga Guard

We wanted to look our best at our Boise encampment in 1939; everyone in the outfit was issued pith helmets with Air Corps colors on them.

MSgt. Joseph A. Bahmeier

In 1938 the squadron acquired the three-seat North American O-47A, which was an all-metal, enclosed-cockpit airplane. One of the latest models being produced for the Army Air Corps and driven by a 1,000-horsepower engine, the aircraft flew at 180 miles per hour. The squadron eventually received the BC-1A, similar to the T-6 training aircraft the organization flew in the post-World War II era.

The War Department's plans for expanding the Air Corps, in accordance with the rearmament program sponsored by President Roosevelt, called for doubling the equipment and personnel of the 45th Division Aviation, Colorado National Guard. But before the new aircraft, along with additional equipment, trucks, trailers, photographic and radio equipment would be

Night medical mission: Squadron commander Maj. Bonfils, Capt. Ray Wilson and Sgt. Charles West attach a flashlight to botulism antitoxin package they later dropped over Cheyenne, March 1939.



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Informal critique: 120th OS officers, November 1931.

provided, the War Department insisted the squadron clear up a lingering problem involving clear title to the municipal airport hangar. It seemed the unit had run out of money after completing the hangar and worked out an arrangement to borrow Denver city funds to install plumbing, heating and lighting. Denver agreed to maintain the hangar for three years, after which possession of the building reverted entirely to the city.

In February 1939, the 120th Observation Squadron, along with the photographic section and medical department detachment, were relieved from the 45th Division and attached to the 24th Cavalry Division as the 24th Division Aviation. The 24th included the states of Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Washington and Wyoming, with division headquarters at Topeka, Kan. At the time of its assignment to the 24th Cavalry Division, the 120th consisted of 29 officers and 100 enlisted men. Eight new O-47A airplanes, costing some \$60,000 each, had been received. With the new aircraft, as well as a new photographic trailer and radio truck, the squadron was one of the most modern in the service. The squadron was subsequently relieved from the 24th Cavalry Division in 1940 and reformed as the 120th Observation Squadron, Army Air Corps.

The proficiency of the 120th Observation Squadron continued to grow over the years. In 1940 the unit was selected as the most efficient squadron in the United States National Guard for the period July 1, 1939, through July 1, 1940, and awarded the

Armament section: Ogle, McCormack, Fiori, Wellman, Harner, McCormack and Morrison with .30-caliber gun, 1931.



Sherburne Trophy ceremony: The squadron was selected as tops in the National Guard from July 1939 through July 1940.

Sherburne Trophy for its achievement. The trophy was presented by the National Guard Association for the last time that year. The retired Sherburne Trophy was on display in the trophy room of the National Guard Memorial Building in Washington, D.C., for many years. Its whereabouts today is unknown.

Men who matched the mountains

The 120th was the first flying organization in Colorado during the years prior to World War II. Much valuable work had been accomplished. Important service to the state was provided during the Coal Strike of 1927. Mercy flights to deliver serum and emergency medical supplies were made throughout Colorado and the adjoining states, in all kinds of weather and under all conditions. One example of this type of mission occurred when Capt. Harry Wellman, MSgt. Sam McGrew and SSgt. Joe C. Moffitt flew an O-47 to Cortez in the late 1930s to deliver medicine to cope with a bad siege of food poisoning.

Flying throughout the Rocky Mountain region, the unit immeasurably aided the progress of high-altitude aviation in those early years. Prior to the flying exploits of the Colorado Guardsmen, little thought had been given to the hazards of taking off and landing low-powered aircraft one mile above sea level; especially while carrying normal gasoline and oil loads, plus the extra weight of necessary accessories. The Colorado squadron proved that practical flying, every day of the year, was possible in higher altitudes in a great variety of weather conditions.

The unit was often called upon to present air demonstrations to promote an interest in both flying and establishing good airfields in towns throughout the area. The objectives met both community and Air Guard needs and the squadron became

Hard-nose Charlie

I joined the 120th in the fall of 1931 and was immediately assigned to the armament section. We had to learn to boresight the O-2H's .30-caliber machine gun which fired through the propeller. As TSgt. Charlie West said, "You guys gotta learn to boresight this gun. Last year, Fred Schaefer boresighted these guns wrong and we shot up some propellers. This ain't gonna happen again." My primary interest was the airplane, but I sure got a lot of experience and enjoyment working with Charlie West.

SMSgt. Stan Morrison



New aircraft: The unit's three-seat North American O-47 shortly after arrival at Denver Municipal Airport in October 1938.

well known in the western United States. Whenever the squadron received a new type of aircraft, a few of the older planes would be sent to various colleges within the state to aid their aviation programs. The flying unit also performed liaison missions with other branches of the service and flew photographic missions for state and federal agencies. Guard planes were used as rapid conveyance for state officials, newspapermen, physicians and many others. The 120th searched for missing persons, occasionally helping state and federal police hunt down bank robbers and other fugitives from justice. The unit also flew many thousands of miles over mountain wilderness patrolling for forest fires and, of course, assisted in airmail duties in the early 1930s.

In the final analysis, the 120th Observation Squadron and the men who composed it were truly Colorado's flying pioneers in those early years. A *Denver Post* article of the day said it well, calling early Colorado National Guard members: "a handful of flying men whose gallant courage, enduring patience and unstained loyalty have written into Colorado's history the story of an epic as colorful and daring as that achieved by the brave men and women who crossed the plains and the mountains in prairie schooners in the late 1850s and early 1860s. Colorado National Guard fliers have done something that stands alone in



Boise war maneuvers: Adj. Gen. Richardson and Maj. Bonfils (standing, far left) with squadron members, 1939.

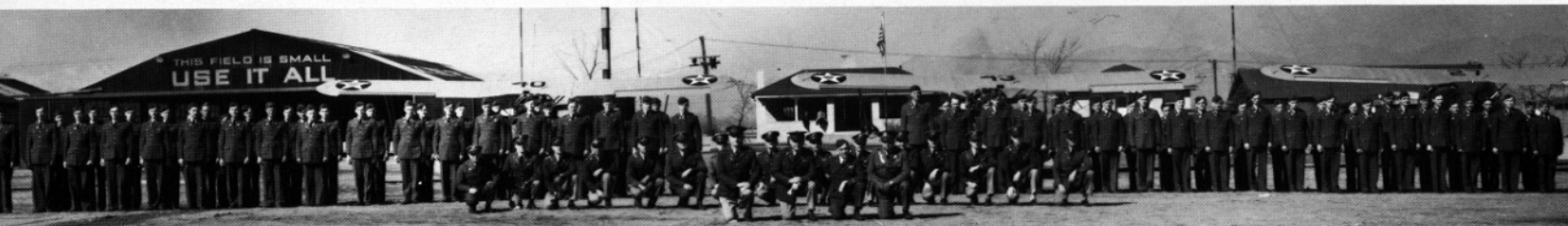
international aviation records — *They Have Conquered the Rockies!*"

The unit served well in peace time and maintained its primary function . . . to be prepared for war, a function that would soon be tested.

No darn earthly good

My dad didn't want me to join the military or learn how to fly. I remember one of our neighbors, Tony Bollers, telling him, "Bob, you might as well let him fly. He's no darn earthly good anyhow." One of our other neighbors, Mr. Frederick, also endorsed my interest in flying saying, "All that kid's interested in now is race horses and women. Let him fly."

Maj. Gen. Joe C. Moffitt

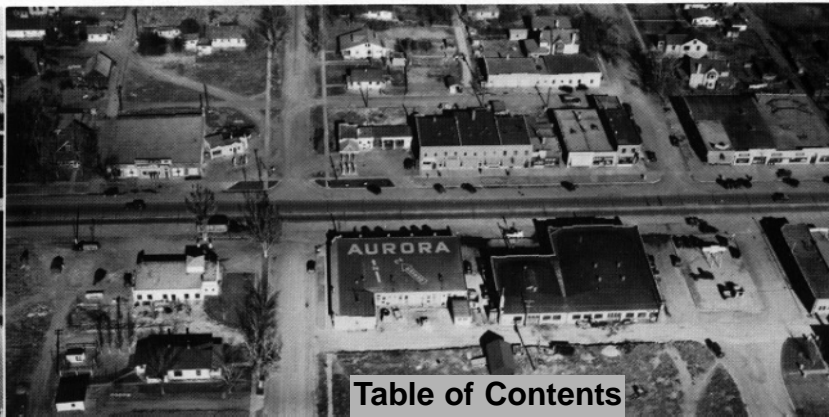


Last inspection at old Lowry Field: 120th OS, photo section, medical department and 45th Division Aviation, 1937.

Aviators: Colorado National Guard pilots, 1934.



Airways marker: Identified location and direction for early COANG aviators; Colfax Avenue and Havana Street, 1936.





World War II activation: Called to duty in 1941, Colorado's 120th Observation Squadron took its North American three-seat O-47As to Biggs Field, Texas, and other duty locations. After unit inactivation in 1943, squadron personnel scattered and served in many theaters of operation.