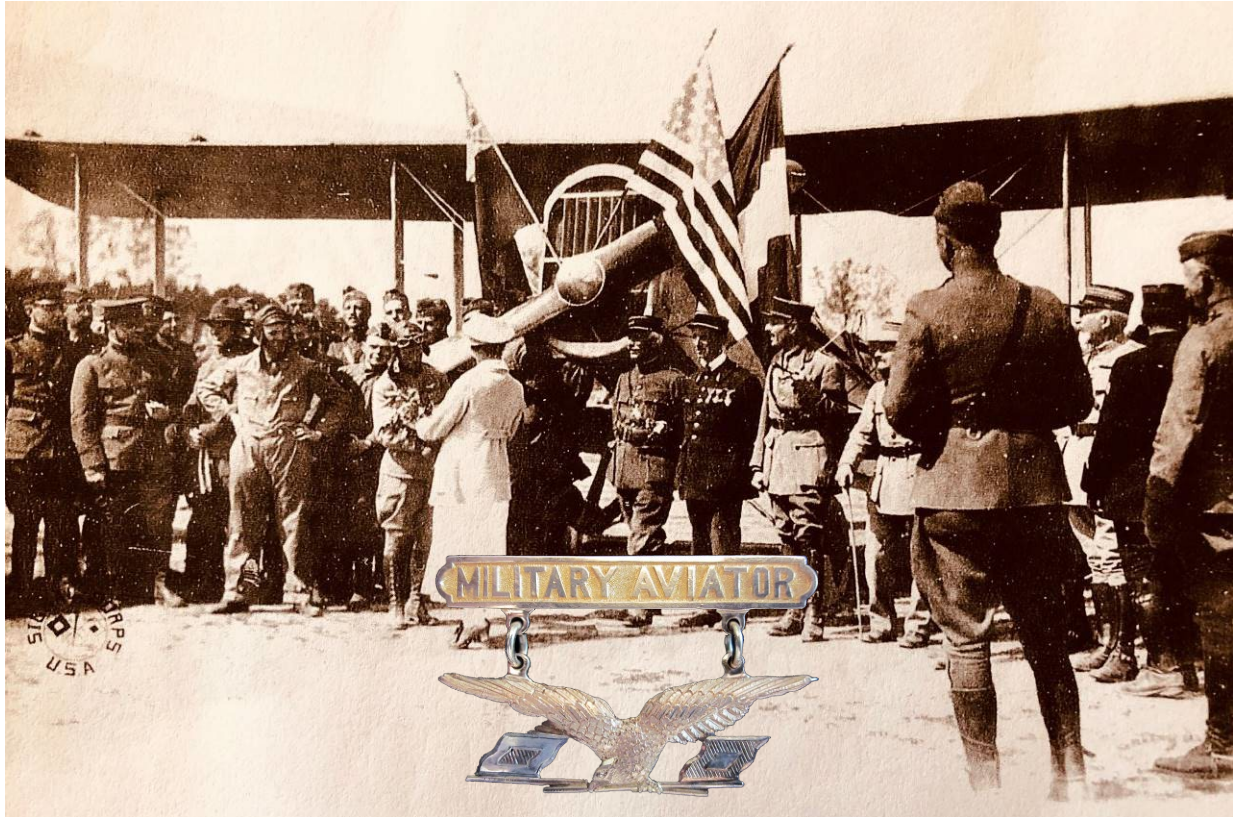


CAPTAIN BEE RIFE OSBORNE



KENTUCKY NATIONAL GUARD'S FIRST ARMY AVIATOR

JOHN M. TROWBRIDGE
2019

Cover: Ceremony conducted prior to the first flight in France of an American DH-4 Liberty Plane. *U. S. Army Signal Corps Photograph.*

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Introduction

The first Signal Corps organization in the Kentucky National was established in September of 1915.

In late August 1915, Captain Otto Holstein reported that forty-eight men had applied for membership in the Signal Corps Company, one of the individuals listed was B. R. Osborne, a telegraph operator, then employed by Western Union Telegraph Company at Lexington.¹ On 01 September, Bee Rife Osborne was mustered into the newly organized Company A, Signal Corps, Kentucky National Guard.

From the beginning of establishing a Kentucky Signal Corps, Captain Otto Holstein, always the innovator, wanted to establish an Aviation Section for the Corps.

Kentucky Signal Corps to Have Aviation Section; K. G. Pulliam, Jr., Appointed to Take Training

Captain Otto Holstein, of the Lexington Signal Corps Company, announces that thru the generosity of the Curtiss Aeroplane Company, a free course of training will be given to one of the Signal Corps' officers. A cash bonus will also be given the officer selected for this course of training to partially defray his expenses while at the Curtiss School.

Keeling G. Pulliam, Jr., until recently, Master Signal Electrician of Company A, Signal Corps, Kentucky National Guard, has been selected for the course of instruction, having signified his interest in the work, will be commissioned an officer and will receive the appointment to the Curtiss school, probably taking the course at their Buffalo plant where instruction in the mechanical end of the science can also be studied.

Mr. Pulliam will probably commence his course of instruction early next June after his graduation from State University, where he is now a senior.

The Kentucky Militia will thus enjoy a rather unique distinction of having a trained aviator connected with the Signal Corps, a thing calculated to make it a most valuable adjunct to the organization in event of the Kentucky Signal Corps Company ever being called into active service.

Will Train Officer From Each State.

The Curtiss Aeroplane Company has offered to train an officer of the militia of each of the 48 States. This training will be given on either land or water aeroplanes at any of the following points, at which Curtiss aviation schools are located: Buffalo, N. Y.; Hammondsport, N. Y.; Newport News, Va., and San Diego, Cal. Another school will be established at Sheepshead Bay Speedway, New York City, in the spring. This training will continue until the officer appointed secures his official pilot license, which is issued by the Aero Club of America. Such a course is worth \$400.

Thru Emerson McMillin, of New York, the Aero Club of America adds 10 per cent, to this \$400. The check for \$40 will be sent to the Adjutant General of each State upon receipt of advice that the officer is ready to report at one of the Curtiss schools for his training. This amount is to go toward defraying expenses incidental to his training.

This contribution of the Curtiss Company to the National Aeroplane Fund will add 48 trained militia officers to the aerial forces as well as enable the militia of most of the States to take the first step toward organizing an aviation section.²

On 01 August 1907 an Aeronautical Division was established within the office of the Chief Signal Officer. In 1908, the Wright brothers made test flights of the Army's first airplane built to Signal Corps' specifications. Army aviation remained within the Signal Corps until 1918 when it became the Army Air Service.³

On 23 March 1916, it was announced in *The Lexington Herald* that Sergeant First Class Bee R. Osborne, would also be taking the aviation course conducted by the Curtiss Aviation School.

Another Local Boy to Take Aviation Course Lieutenant B. R. Osborne, of Signal Corps, To Enter Curtiss School

The commission of B. R. Osborne, of Lexington, as a Lieutenant in the National Guard by Adjutant General J. Tandy Ellis yesterday insures Lexington of two young aviators in the Curtiss schools this summer. Keeling G. Pulliam, Jr., several days ago qualified for one of the scholarships and there is still a third unclaimed.

Lieutenant Osborne was a member of Company A, Signal Corps, and is familiar with the operation of wireless telegraphy. He was formerly night chief operator at the Western Union Telegraph Company's local office and is now night manager of the Peerless Taxicab Company. He is conversant with the operation and repair of the gas engine and is considered well qualified to receive the instruction.

Lieutenant Osborne will be sent to the Curtiss school at Newport News, Va., and will leave soon for his new field.

Lieutenant K. G. Pulliam, who recently qualified for one of the other scholarships, will go as soon as the term at State University⁴ is over, to the Curtiss plant at Buffalo, N. Y., where he will have an opportunity to study the construction and assembling of the machine as well as the operation.⁵

Due to his attendance at the University of Kentucky Keeling G. Pulliam was unable to attend aviation school before Osborne.

Bee Rife Osborne would become the Kentucky National Guard's first aviator. The following is his story and tells his place in the history of this organization.

U. S. ARMY AIR SERVICE

Army interest in aviation began with the purchase by the Signal Corps of an airplane in 1908. Three years later, a flying station was opened at College Park, Maryland, equipped with five airplanes and three small captive balloons. In 1913, this equipment was moved to San Diego, California, to a station which became known as Rockwell Field.

In 1914, the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps was authorized by Congress to operate or supervise the operation of all military aircraft, including balloons and aeroplanes, and to train officers and enlisted men in matters pertaining to military aviation. In 1915, the Aeronautical Division was established in the Office of the Chief Signal Officer entrusted with the supervision of aviation matters.

In March 1916, when the Punitive Expedition entered Mexico, the Army had only one aero squadron with 13 planes in commission. Three months later, the passage of the National Defense Act fixed the personnel of the Aviation Section at 1 colonel, 1 lieutenant colonel, 8 majors, 24 captains, and 114 lieutenants, to be detailed from the Army at large. If sufficient suitable officers could not be found in this manner, the difference was to be supplied by appointments in the grade of aviator, newly created by the law. The Act gave the President authority to organize as many aero squadrons as the necessities of the service demanded, and made provision for a Reserve Corps aviation section.

Hazlehurst Field, Mineola, Long Island, was opened in June 1916 with a capacity of about 50 students. With facilities available at the time, 14 pilots were trained in 1914, 25 in 1915, and 43 in 1916. A third field was established at Essington, Pennsylvania, 01 April 1917. At this time, two Regular aero squadrons were in existence, a number of National Guard students were receiving instruction at the flying fields, and 125 civilian candidates for Reserve appointment were in training at the Curtiss airplane factories.

The National Guard contained no aviation units although the 1st Aero Company, New York National Guard, organized in 1916, had received provisional recognition as the 1st Reserve Aero Squadron before it was disbanded in May 1917. A second New York National Guard squadron was in process of organization before outbreak of war, but no Reserve Corps units proper had been created.⁶

Tentative System for the Organization of the Aviation Section

Official Announcement by the Officer in Charge, Aviation Section, Signal Corps, U.S.A.

Appendix D

Detail of Officers and Enlisted Men of the National Guard at Signal Corps Aviation Schools.

Officers and enlisted men of the National Guard may be detailed at Signal Corps aviation schools under section 99 of the national defense act. National Guard officers and men desiring such course will put in their applications to the adjutant general of their respective States who will forward the applications direct to the Chief, Militia Bureau, War Department, Washington, D. C. Such officers and enlisted men will be required to pass the prescribed physical and mental examinations which will be similar to those required of reserve officers, Aviation Section, Signal Officers' Reserve Corps. On approval by the Militia Bureau, orders will be requested from the Adjutant General of the Army assigning such officers or enlisted men to duty at aviation schools.⁷

Physiological Tests for National Guard and Naval Militia Fliers

The candidates for aerial service in the National Guard and the Naval Militia, before receiving their military and naval licenses, are required to submit to a special rigorous physical examination to determine their fitness for such duty. The essential features of this test are as follows:

The visual acuity without glasses should be normal. Any error of refraction requiring correction by glasses or any other cause diminishing acuity of vision

below normal will be a cause for rejection. The candidate's ability to estimate distances will be determined. Color blindness for red, green, or violet is a cause for rejection. If the candidate wears glasses, so state, and give the necessity therefore.

The acuity of hearing should be carefully tested and the ears carefully examined with the aid of the speculum and mirror. Any diminution of the acuity of hearing below normal will be cause for rejection. Any disease whatever of the middle ear, either acute or chronic, or a former acute condition, will be a cause for rejection. Any disease of the internal ear or of the auditory nerve will be a cause for rejection.

The following tests for equilibrium to detect otherwise obscure diseased condition of the internal ear should be made: (a) Have the candidate stand with knees, heels and toes touching; (b) have the candidate walk forward, backward and in a circle; (c) have the candidate hop around the room.

All these tests should be made with the eyes open, and then closed; the third test on both feet, and then on one foot; hopping forward and backward, the candidate trying to hop or walk in a straight line. Any deviation to the right or left from the straight line or from the arc of the circle should be noted. Any persistent deviation either to the right or left is evidence of a diseased condition of the internal ear, and nystagmus is frequently associated with such condition. These symptoms should, therefore, be regarded as causes for rejection.

The organs of respiration and the circulatory system should be carefully examined. Any diseased condition of the circulatory system, either of the heart or arterial system, is a cause for rejection. Any disease of the nervous system is a cause for rejection.

The precision of the movements of the limbs should be especially carefully tested.

Any candidate whose history may show that he is afflicted with chronic digestive disturbances, chronic constipation, or indigestion, or intestinal disorders tending to produce dizziness, headache, or to impair his vision, and any excess that may disturb his mental balance, or to alcoholism, should be rejected.

Any marked departure from normal blood pressure will be considered a cause for rejection.⁸

The Aviation Section was hampered in obtaining and keeping personnel by those provisions of the Act of 18 July 1914, which specified that only unmarried lieutenants of the line under 30 years of age would be eligible for service with the Section.⁹

Sections 37 and 55 of the National Defense Act of 3 June 1916, provided for a Signal Officers Reserve Corps and a Signal Enlisted Reserve Corps, comprising 297 officers and 2,000 enlisted men who were to be trained under the direction of the Aviation Section. The Officers Reserve Corps was established for the purpose of providing a reserve of officers available for military service when needed. Its members must be citizens of the United States or the Philippines and must be at least 21 years of age. The appointment was for five years, but in time of war was to continue until six months after the war ended.

Second Lieutenant Bee Osborne was ordered to active duty for initial flying training at the Curtiss school at Newport News, followed by military aviation training at Mineola, Long Island, New York.¹⁰

National Guard officers and enlisted men could also be detailed to the Signal Corps Aviation schools, and those who desired air training could apply to their state adjutant general, who would forward their applications to the Chief of the Militia Bureau in Washington. On approval by the Bureau, orders were requested from The Adjutant General of the Army assigning the applicants to duty at the aviation schools; there they were required to pass the prescribed physical and mental examinations.

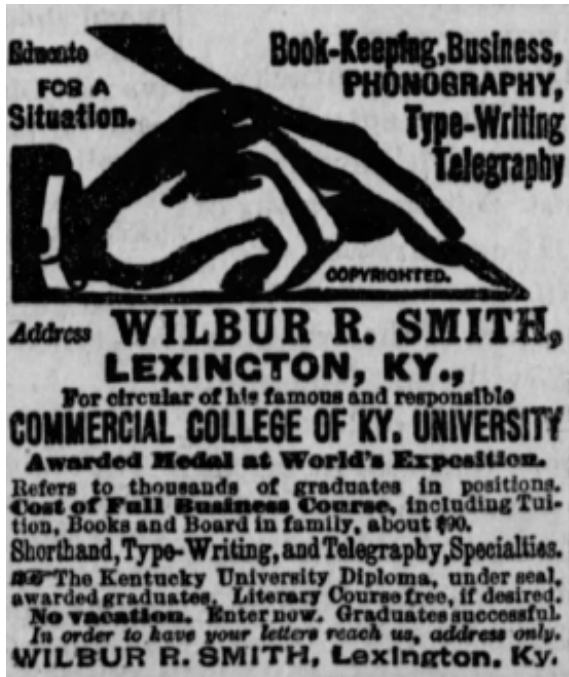
A similar procedure was followed by those who wished to enter the Signal Officers Reserve Corps. Citizens between 21 and 30 years of age applied to The Adjutant General, stating the grade desired, previous military experience, and educational qualification; they included in the application, letters of recommendation as well as names of persons knowing the applicant. The candidate then appeared before an examining board and was given the same physical examination required for air officers of the Regular Army. The applicant was not given a mental examination but the equivalent of a college education was required. Flying ability was the first consideration and no applicant for commission was to be considered proficient until he was able to pass the flying test for Reserve Military Aviator (RMA) unless especially excepted by the chief of the Aviation Section. The recommendation of the board passed through the chief of the Aviation Section to The Adjutant General. If the candidate was approved, he would be commissioned for five years with a possibility of being recommissioned for successive periods of five years each. In time of actual or threatened hostilities officers of the SORC were subject to such duty as the President might prescribe. The officer in charge of the Aviation Section, when authorized by the Secretary of War, might order Reserve officers to duty for a period of not more than 15 days a year, during which period the Reserve Officer would receive the same pay and allowances as an officer of the same rank in the Regular Army. With the consent of the Reserve Officer he might be retained on active duty for such a period as the Secretary of War might prescribe.¹¹

The preliminary flying test consisted of making three figure 8's around pylons 1,600 feet apart, with turns limited to a radius of 800 feet; accomplishing a dead-engine landing from 300 feet and stopping within 150 feet of a previously designated point; making an altitude flight to at least 1,000 feet; and gliding with engine throttled, changing direction of 90° to right and left. Students were encouraged to take the Aero Club of America test for an FAI certificate. The requirements for the Reserve Military Aviator test were: climbing to 500 feet from a 2,000-foot square field, keeping within the area above the field; gliding at normal angles with engine throttled, executing spirals to right and left, and changing direction in gliding; killing the engine at 1,000 feet and landing within 200 feet of a previously designated point; landing over an assumed obstacle 10 feet high and stopping within 1,500 feet; making a cross-country triangular flight of 30 miles, passing over 2 previously designated points, at a minimum of 2,500 feet altitude; making a straightaway cross-country flight of 30 miles at an altitude of 2,500 feet and landing at a designated destination; and flying 45 minutes at 4,000 feet.¹²

1886 to 1914

Bee Rife Osborne was born 22 November 1886, in Midway, Woodford County, Kentucky, a son of James Wesley and Polly Ann Stamper Osborne.¹³ He attended Fayette County schools and attended the Wilbur Smith Business College, at Lexington.¹⁴

1900 Census: Bee is a student living at home with parents in Lexington, Magisterial District 8, Fayette County, Kentucky, age 13.



Young man, Educate for Success at Wilbur Smith's Business College.

Teachers, Clerks, and Farmer boys should pursue the Business Shorthand and Typewriting or Telegraphic course at Wilbur Smith's Business College, Lexington, Ky. He refers to 10,000 successful graduates. Kentucky University diploma under seal awarded his graduates. Over 500 students from 20 states this year. The demand for his graduates at this time to fill positions exceeds the supply. This College has not been closed a week day in 27 years. Students can begin at any time. Cost reasonable. If you have any idea of attending a Business College this winter or spring, write immediately for a large, illustrated catalogue to W. R. Smith, Lexington, Ky.¹⁵

1910 Census: Bee is living in Tupelo Ward 3, Lee County, Mississippi, age 23. The record states that he was married to Rosa Osborne: age 17; born, 1893 in Indianola, Mississippi. According to the record they had been married one year (1909). The couple were boarders in the home of William A. and Mary Menoghan, on Spring Street, in Tupelo. Bee is listed as a telegraph operator for Western Union Telegraph Company.¹⁶

Goes to Leland.

Mr. Bee Osborne, who has been connected with the Western Union office here as night operator, left this morning to accept a position in Leland.¹⁷

In his enlistment papers with the Kentucky National Guard on 01 September 1915, Osborne states that he had 3 years of previous military service with Company M, 3rd Regiment, Mississippi National Guard. This would indicate that he initially joined the National Guard in or about 1912. Currently trying to get copies of his service record from Mississippi. He would have been 26 years old in 1912.

While Bee was living and working in Mississippi, on 04 July 1913, his older brother, Clarence and younger brother, Eli join Lexington's Company C, 2nd Infantry Regiment, of the Kentucky National Guard.¹⁸

On 28 July 1914, in Europe, what would become known as the “War to End All War” begins. The United States would not become involved until 06 April 1917, more than two and half years after it had started.

By 1914, Bee was back in Kentucky working in the Western Union Office at Lexington, on 09 September 1914, he married Cora Cook of Lexington.

Elope To Wed on Motorcycle

Congratulations are being showered upon Mr. and Mrs. Bee Osborne who were married Wednesday at Versailles, surprising their friends by an “elopement” to that place. Mr. Osborne is night telegraph operator at the Western Union Telegraph office in Lexington, while his bride was Miss Cora Cook, of 179 East High Street, an attractive and popular young lady of this city. The ceremony was performed by Rev. R. J. Bamber, of Versailles, and the trip to that city was made on Mr. Osborne’s motorcycle. Mr. and Mrs. Osborne returned to Lexington directly after the ceremony and received the parental blessing as well as the congratulation of their numerous friends.¹⁹

1915

Bee Rife Osborne was one of the first men to enlist in the newly organized Company A, Signal Corps, Kentucky National Guard, at Lexington. He enlisted as a Private in the company on 01 September 1915, at the age of 28. At the time he was living at 179 E. High Street, Lexington. His weight is 119 ½ lbs.; height is 5' 4 ½"; gray eyes, brown hair and light complexion. His civilian occupation is listed as a telegraph operator for the Western Union Company. He stated that he had prior military service, three years with Company M, 3rd Infantry Regiment, Mississippi National Guard.

Signal Corps Gets Wireless Message from Arlington

Captain Otto Holstein, of Company A, Signal Corps, Kentucky National Guard, set his watch yesterday afternoon by wireless signals sent from the United States naval wireless station at Arlington, Virginia, across the Potomac from Washington and slightly over four hundred miles from Lexington by air line.

At 10:30 o'clock last night, First Class Sergeant Osborne copied press reports and code telegrams from the naval wireless station at Charleston, S. C.—call "NAO"—but since the Government has ordered that secrecy be maintained in regard to the nature of wireless communications, for obvious reasons nothing can be said regarding them other than that they were plainly received at the signal corps headquarters here.²⁰

At this time Bee Osborne was a Sergeant First Class in Company A.

Local Signal Corps Goes on Hike Today

Scouting squads of the local signal corps, under Lieutenant Lawrence Heyman and Sergeant George Shely, will be led into the Pisgah neighborhood this morning for drill in wigwag and semaphore signaling.

The Heyman squad will leave the Signal Corps room in the Fayette National Bank building at 9 o'clock and Sergeant Shely will follow at 9:20 o'clock with another squad. They will carry their field equipment and dinners will be cooked in the field.

They will be composed of Lieutenant Lawrence Heyman, Sergeants Shely and Osborne, Jesse Hammond, John B. Bryan, Jesse B. Hinton, James W. Purnell, James C. Anderson, James D. Turner and H. Turner.²¹

1916

On 8-9 March 1916, in need of supplies during the Mexican Revolution, Pancho Villa led his men, the Army of the North, in a raid on the U. S. garrison, across the Mexican-U. S. border, at Columbus, New Mexico. The raid quickly escalated into a full-scale battle when Villa's men encountered the U. S. military stationed at the post. Villa's force was compelled to retreat back across the border. This incident led to U. S. Forces invading Mexico, the Mexican Punitive Expedition, in an attempt to capture Villa, led by General John "Black Jack" Pershing.

In Washington, the border crisis spurred passage of the long-debated defense legislation, legislation which might have replaced the Guard with a completely Federal reserve force. Instead, the new legislation called for stricter Federal standards for the Guard, in return for its reaffirmation as the Army's first-line combat reserve.

On 22 March 1916, *The Lexington Herald* reported that the two local guard units, Company C, 2nd Kentucky Infantry, in which Clarence and Eli Osborn were serving, and Company A, Signal Corps, were competing in a Rifle Match at the armory. The team representing Company A had been selected Saturday afternoon and was composed of: Captain Holstein, Lieutenant Pulliam, Sergeants Osborne, Wallace and Cregor and Private Drakeford.²²

A side bar story in connection with Company A was published in *The Lexington Herald* on 23 March 1916:

Another Local Boy to Take Aviation Course

Lieutenant B. R. Osborne, of Signal Corps, To Enter Curtiss School

The commission of B. R. Osborne, of Lexington, as a Lieutenant in the National Guard by Adjutant General J. Tandy Ellis yesterday insures Lexington of two young aviators in the Curtiss schools this summer. Keeling G. Pulliam, Jr., several days ago qualified for one of the scholarships and there is still a third unclaimed.

Lieutenant Osborne was a member of Company A, Signal Corps, and is familiar with the operation of wireless telegraphy. He was formerly night chief operator at the Western Union Telegraph Company's local office and is now night manager of the Peerless Taxicab Company. He is conversant with the operation and repair of the gas engine and is considered well qualified to receive the instruction.

Lieutenant Osborne will be sent to the Curtiss school at Newport News, Va., and will leave soon for his new field.

Lieutenant K. G. Pulliam, who recently qualified for one of the other scholarships, will go as soon as the term at State University²³ is over, to the Curtiss plant at Buffalo, N. Y., where he will have an opportunity to study the construction and assembling of the machine as well as the operation. The third scholarship, open to Lieutenants in the State Guard is unclaimed, and will entitle the holder to instruction in the Grinnell Aviation School, at Grinnell, Ia.²⁴

Lexington May Have an Aviation School

Formation of Aero Club in Kentucky Is Being Considered

An aviation school for Lexington in connection with the National Guard has been announced as the outcome of the probable formation of a Kentucky Aero Club, to be affiliated with the Aero Club of America.

Lieutenant Pulliam²⁵, who will leave for the Curtiss training school at the end of the present term of school, and Lieutenant B. Osborne²⁶, who will leave today for the school, will be qualified at the end of their two months training to teach aviation.

An aeroplane will be purchased and a hanger built here with money raised among public spirited citizens who would become members.²⁷

Aviation Expense Received.

Second Lieut. B. Osborne, of Lexington, a member of the Signal Corps, K. N. G., will go to Newport News April 1 to attend the Curtiss aviation school. The Aero Club of America to-day sent Adj. Gen. Ellis \$150 to be applied on the expenses.²⁸



Flight training at the Curtiss Aviation School, Newport News, Virginia, 1916.

Aviator Pupils Commissioned.

B. R. Osborne, a member of Company A, Signal Corps, K. N. G., of this city, has been commissioned Lieutenant by Adj. Gen. J. Tandy Ellis, the appointment being made to enable Osborne to accept the aviation scholarship offered by the Curtiss Company, and thus give the Kentucky militia another air scout.

Keeling G. Pulliam, Jr., of this city, was appointed to one of the scholarships several weeks ago and no appointment has yet been made for the last of the three scholarships which the Curtiss Company gives to the militia of each State.

Lieut. Osborne will be sent to the Curtiss school at Newport News, Va., and will leave April 1. Lieut. Pulliam, who will go to the Buffalo [NY] school, will not be able to get away until his graduation from State University in June. Gen. Ellis expects soon to make the appointment to the third scholarship, which is open to any Lieutenant in the Kentucky National Guard, and which will entitle the holder to the course of instruction in the Grinnell Aviation School, at Grinnell, Ia.²⁹

Bee Osborne was transferred from the Signal Corps to Company H, 3rd Infantry Regiment at Hartford, Kentucky, on 25 March 1916.

State of Kentucky

Special Orders No. 46

Adjutant General's Office
Frankfort, Ky., March 25, 1916.

1. With the approval of the Commanding Officers of Co. A, Signal Corps, and Co. H, 3rd Infantry, private B. Osborne, Co. A, Signal Corps, is hereby transferred to Co. H, 3rd Infantry, as of this date.
2. Private B. Osborne, Co. H, 3rd Infantry, is hereby appointed 2nd Lieutenant, Co. H, 3rd Infantry, as of this date.

Lieutenant Osborne will be obeyed and respected accordingly.

3. 2nd Lieutenant B. Osborne, Co. H, 3rd Infantry, is hereby detailed to attend the Curtiss School of Aviation, at Newport News, Virginia, reporting to the official in charge, on April 1st, 1916.

The sum of One Hundred and Fifty (\$1250.00) Dollars received by The Adjutant General of Kentucky from the Aero Club of America, is hereby placed in the hands of Lieutenant Osborne to pay such portion of his expenses as may be necessary while taking the course. Lieutenant Osborne will render an itemized account covering the expenditure of these funds at the end of each month, filing receipts for all expenditures amounting to one dollar or more.

By Order of the Governor:

[James Tandy Ellis]
The Adjutant General.

State Aviation School Urged Proposed Institute Fostered By Capt. Holstein.

Lexington, Ky., March 31.—Capt. Otto Holstein, of Company A, Signal Corps, Kentucky National Guard, hopes to establish soon a school of aviation in Lexington for the Kentucky National Guard, with arrangements whereby civilians also may enter. The school would be under the auspices of a Kentucky Aero Club, affiliated with the Aero Club of America. Lieut. B. Osborne, of Company A, will leave to-morrow for a course of study in the Curtiss school, and Lieut. K. G. Pulliam, Jr., will go on June 20 for a similar course.

With the return of these officers after two months training, they will be qualified to teach aviation, and the establishment of a school as an adjunct of the Kentucky Aero Club, it is proposed.

Lieut. Pulliam now is at work on a constitution for the club. It is anticipated that a large number of public spirited citizens and patriotic people over the Commonwealth would become members, and fees would go toward defraying the cost of a machine.³⁰

Militia Officers Detailed to Receive Aviation Training Under the Offer of the Curtiss Aeroplane Company

Kentucky.—Brig. Gen. J. Tandy Ellis, The Adjutant General, has detailed Lieut. B. Osborn[e], of the Signal Corps, to report at the Curtiss Aviation School, Newport News, Va., for training in aviation.³¹



Second Lieutenant Bee Rife Osborne is on the far right of this group of National Guard aviators. This was the first group of military student pilots to attend the flight instruction course at the Atlantic Coast Aeronautical Station, Hampton Roads, in April 1916. They are standing in front of a Curtiss JN-4D two-seat trainer. *Courtesy of the George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.*

In an article appearing in the 16 April 1916 edition of *The Lexington Herald* mention is made of a recent letter from Lieutenant Osborne to Captain Holstein:

In a recent letter to Captain Holstein, Lieutenant Bee Osborne, who recently left this city to take up aviation work in the Curtiss Aviation School, writes that militia officers from all over the United States are taking advantage of the course of instruction offered by the company. The instruction commences with the relatively slow air craft and finishes with the latest type up-to-date military planes having a speed of 85 to 90 miles an hour. His first duties were in connection with gas engines.³²



The militia students and instructors at the Atlantic Coast Aeronautic Station. The militia officers are trained by the Curtiss Aeroplane Co. free of charge and the Aero Club of America pays their personal expenses.

Aero Club Committee Visits the Atlantic Coast Aeronautical Station

. . . The committee inspected the North Atlantic Aviation Station and met the forty or so Militia officers and civilian aviators and students who are here learning to fly or waiting for their turn to take up training. At present, although there are ten or twelve machines here, which is more than the Army has, there is

not sufficient equipment to train all the men who are here for training. But additional machines and equipment is expected from the Buffalo Curtiss plant. . .

The National Aeroplane Fund of the Aero Club of America is paying the expenses of the Militia officers and civilian aviators taking their course at Newport News. The Curtiss Company is giving the course of training free for the Militia officers who have been detailed by the adjutant generals of seventeen states. . .

The men in the Militia Section of the School are making rapid progress. Seventeen states are represented . . . Lieutenant Lee [Bee] Osborne, Kentucky. .³³

Raising Funds for an Aeroplane for Kentucky National Guard

With a view of obtaining funds to apply on the purchase price of an aeroplane for the joint use of Company A, Signal Corps, K. N. G., and the Aero Club of Kentucky, in process of formation by Lieutenant Keeling G. Pulliam, Jr., Captain Otto Holstein has opened communication with Henry B. Marks, of Chicago, for the production of a huge military spectacle in Lexington, in which the local militia companies and possibly the University of Kentucky Cadets will take part. The production of the spectacle requires the use of two large military aeroplanes, which will be brought to Lexington by Mr. Marks in case the negotiations for the productions are closed.

Captain Holstein is making an effort to secure two additional scholarships in aviation schools for the members of the Signal Corps. Two in the Curtiss School have already been awarded to Lieutenant B. Osborne and Lieutenant Keeling G. Pulliam, Jr. Lieutenant Osborne is taking his course now, and Lieutenant Pulliam will leave at the close of the present term of school at State University, where he is a student, to take up the work. Captain Holstein is anxious to secure the additional scholarships, so as to have four aviators who would be available for service in case of war.

The Aero Club of America is paying the expenses of the officers under training. The training is given free by the Curtiss Company.³⁴

While Lieutenant Osborne continued his aviation training, the nation and the military were watching events develop along the Mexican-U. S. border. The National Defense Act of 1916 was only two weeks old when President Woodrow Wilson, responding to diplomatic and military threats from Mexico, federalized the entire National Guard. The Kentucky Brigade was mobilized for Mexican Border Service on 18 June of 1916, conducting initial training at Fort Thomas, Kentucky. In August 1916 the Brigade moved to Fort Bliss, near El Paso, Texas.

Lieutenant Bee Osborne to Return to Lexington on Completing Course

. . . Announcement was made that Lieutenant Bee Osborne, of Company A, Signal Corps, K.N.G., and the captain of the rifle company, would return to Lexington today after completing his course in aviation training under the instruction of the Curtiss Aeroplane Company, and would assume charge of the company. . .³⁵

Osborne Needs Aid.

Lieutenant Bee Osborne, of the company, who is at Newport News taking a course in aviation as the representative of the Kentucky National Guard, has telegraphed Captain Holstein that he must have \$30 with which to finish his course, as he has to have sixty minutes more of flight in the air before he can be graduated and return to his company. Captain Holstein has already assisted Lieutenant Osborne out of his own pocket and other means will be employed to secure the money needed for Lieutenant Osborne to complete the course. . .³⁶

Young Aviator Ready.

. . . Capt. Holstein received a telegram to-day from Lieut. B. Osborne, of the company, who is taking the aviation course at Newport News, saying that he had almost finished his instruction and that the last test would be a sixty minutes' flight.³⁷

Aviator Ordered To Report.

Lieut. B. Osborne, who has been attending the aviation school at Newport News, has been ordered to report to his company, H, Third Regiment, Hartford.³⁸

In July 1916, he was sent to Mineola New York Signal Corps Aviation Station to begin his military flight training. He would complete the course successfully and earned his Reserve Military Aviator certification and his FAI [Federation Aeronautique Internationale] pilot's license (No. 623).³⁹

Lexington Birdmen at Fort Thomas One of Them Is a Graduate of the Curtiss Aviation School, And Both Are in the Signal Corps.

Lieutenant Bee Osborne and Keeling G. Pulliam

Ft Thomas, July 15.—In the mobilization camp of the troops of Kentucky there are two young men, natives of the State, quite unassuming chaps, whose profession one would never imagine when talking to them.

The position these two young men hold is not very well known to the general camp and the many people who have talked to them in their quarters near the entrances have never stopped to think they were talking to licensed aviators. Both have completed the courses of training in the art of flying and expect to be on the border if trouble comes.

These two young men are looking forward to flying over the desert sands of Mexico if the United States should ever invade that country. On men of this type will fall the brunt of scout duty and dispatch bearing.

One of these men is a graduate of the Curtiss School for Aviators at Newport News. He is Lieut. Bee Osborne, a native of Lexington. He holds a commission in H Company, of the Third Infantry. The other is Lieut. K. G. Pulliam, Jr., also of Lexington. Both men are assigned to the Signal Corps.

Some months ago the Curtiss School offered a scholarship to a certain number of commissioned officers from each State to take the course in aviation.

Lieutenant Osborne went to the school and completed the course and was awarded a license. Here is what the Kentucky boy did before he completed his education in the aeroplane.

Made Two Flights a Day.

Each day he was required to make two flights, each to be from twenty to thirty minutes' duration. On one flight he rose to an altitude of [unreadable] feet. He was instructed in both the use of the hydroplane and the land [unreadable]. These machines are all high-powered and many are of the type that will be used on the Mexican border. Lieutenant Osborne also saw service with a new armored machine that is equipped with a two-pound recoil gun. The gun is attached to the aeroplane and is operated by the man who is called the observer. It shoots shrapnel and explosives. These scout machines have a speed of 125 miles an hour. They have twenty foot wings and are of ninety horse power. . .⁴⁰



Scene at the Atlantic Coast Aeronautical Station at Newport News, Va., where much of the testing of Curtiss aeroplanes was done during the Summer.

Kentucky to Have an Aviator on Mexican Border

Lt. Osborne, of Lexington, to Undergo Examination for Immediate Service

Ft. Thomas, Ky., July 24.—Lieut. Bee Osborne, of Lexington, aviator and member of the Signal Corps here, probably will be circling back and forth in the air above the Mexican border within a few weeks. He received an order this morning from Gen. Simpson, of the Department of the East instructing him to report at once to Lieut. Carredary, of the U. S. Signal Corps, at Mineola, Long Island.

The telegram stated he would undergo a final examination there to qualify him for immediate service in the aviation branch of the service. If Lieut. Osborne passes the test, he will be ordered to the Mexican border for immediate service, the notice said.

It is believed Lieut. Osborne will have no difficulty in passing the examination. He is a graduate of a government school of aviation at Newport News, and has had experience in several flights. He also was offered a course in the Curtiss School of Aviation. Lieut. Osborne will leave for New York tonight.⁴¹



Members of the Kentucky National Guard gather around a Signal Corps plane taken sometime between August 1916 and February 1917. This is believed to be Signal Corps Plane No. 75, A Curtis R2, which was delivered to Columbus in May 1916. It is unknown if Bee Osborne is the pilot. *Courtesy Kentucky Historical Society Cheshire Collection*

On 22 July 1916, the Signal Corps Aviation Station, Mineola, later Hazlehurst Field, was inaugurated as the Army's second flying school, under the command of 1st Lieutenant Joseph E. Carberry.⁴²

It was originally planned to train aviators at Mineola for duty on the Mexican Border; but as the likelihood for active border service diminished, the plans were altered and instructions were given by the Aviation Section to train a class of 50 student aviators. A number of militia officers from other states were ordered to Mineola. They came into an understaffed and neglected station. . . . Winter was at hand and the men were living in tents. When the weather became extremely cold, some of the personnel were housed in a hanger; the remainder slept in a building which had been used as an office.⁴³

September, 1916

Flying

325



Close to 100 National Guardsmen who had taken up aviation with the assistance of the National Aeroplane Fund of the Aero Club of America are encamped at the Wright aviation field at Mineola, which has become an Army aviation center. The photograph gives an idea of the thorough military aspect of the field.

In July 1916, Osborne is ordered to Mineola, Long Island, to attend military flight school.

The officers stationed at the Mineola station on 25 September 1916 were divided into two categories. There were three Regular Army officers, and 14 Militia officers, included in this second group was: 1st Lt. Bee R. Osborne, Ky.⁴⁴

U. S. National Guard Aviators to 6 April 1917.

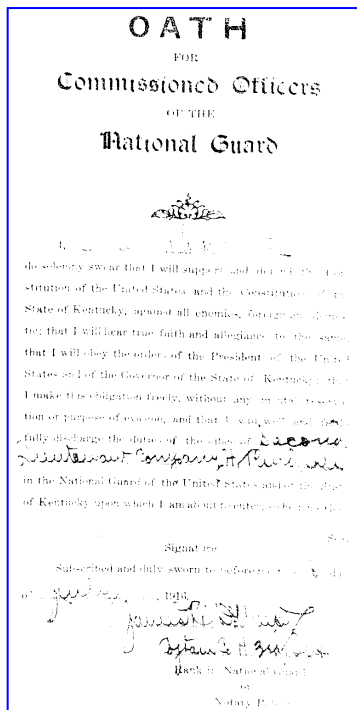
1916:

2nd Lt. B. R. Osborne

FAI No. 623, RMA [Reserve Military Aviator], 1st Lt.⁴⁵

Between July and 31 December 1916, numerous tests were made by the flyers at Mineola, some of the most interesting were bomb tests and winter flying tests, which tested both the pilot and their equipment in extreme weather conditions. In early 1917, the pilots tested metal propellers and practiced aerial photography with the new Brock airplane camera.

Osborne was still officially listed as a militia officer undergoing training at Mineola in February 1917.⁴⁶



Second Lieutenant Bee Rife Osborne's oath taken by Captain James DeWeese, commander of Company H, 3rd Kentucky Infantry Regiment on 06 September 1916.⁴⁷

In early October, Osborne is given a furlough to come home at the birth of his son. On 04 October 1916, Cora Osborne gives birth to the couple's only child, Bee R. Osborne, Jr.

Aviation Corps for Lexington
Lieut. Osborne to Confer with Board of Commerce.
Company to be on Probation for Six Months.
\$7,500 Must be Raised.

Lexington, Ky., Oct. 8.—Lexington will have an aviation corps next spring if the plans of Lieut. Bee Osborne are carried out. Lieut. Osborne, who is one of the twenty representatives of States, stationed at Mineola, L. I., expected to return home and establish such a corps, is here now on a furlough and will take the matter up with the Board of Commerce this week. It is practically settled that the State will have such a station, and the only question is the location, whether in Lexington or some other city. To equip such a station the Federal regulations require that one machine and temporary hangar and field facilities be established by the State or supplied through a public fund, and that the company, when organized, goes on probation for six months, until muster in. When it is adopted by the Government four machines and two motor trucks will be supplied and a regular station equipped and maintained. In the probationary period the Government will furnish gasoline and give other aid.

It is estimated that \$7,500 will be needed for the first cost, which Lieut. Osborne says, could be made up by giving public flights. Members at the aviation schools are required to deposit \$500 as a fee, while the company members would be instructed free of charge.⁴⁸

While at stationed at Mineola and still a member of the Kentucky National Guard, Osborne took part in a National Guard and Army group flight from Mineola to the Philadelphia Navy Yard, a distance of 110 miles, on 30 December 1916. The first group flight was scheduled for 16 December, however, due to snowy conditions it was cancelled. Bee came back home to Kentucky for on a ten-day furlough prior to the second winter flight.

Member Aero Corps.

Lieut. Bee Osborne, of this city, member of the First Aero Corps of the United States, came to Lexington on a ten days' furlough to-day. Lieut. Osborne has only one more flight to make before securing his reserve military aviator license. He was to have made the flight in a 120-mile trip from the Hempstead Plains, L. I., station, to Philadelphia, with fourteen others Saturday, but snow prevented.

Before February 1, Lieut. Osborne expects to return to Lexington again in the interest of citizens in establishing an aviation station here to be maintained by the Government after the first year. The station would be equipped with four aeroplanes and other necessities, and its personnel would comprise four officers and thirty-nine enlisted men.⁴⁹

The second attempt at the winter flight was made on 30 December and Bee was back at Mineola to participate. This was only the second National Guard group flight, but the first joint

flight with the Regular Army. The temperature on the ground was zero and reportedly 18 below at the average flight height of 6,000 feet. The pilots wore their own clothing plus experimental flight suits that the army wanted tested. Even with that protection the pilots nearly froze. Osborne was the one of eighth member of the group to take off, and one of 12 who made it to Philadelphia, arriving there at 11:53 a. m. He made the return flight to Mineola on 31 December, without incident along with three others, out of the group of 12. The remainder of the group made forced landings and continued their journey later in the days that followed.

Fly to Philadelphia Today

Twelve Machines in Postponed Trip Due to Start at 8:30 A. M.

Mineola, L. I., Dec. 29.—The squadron flight by twelve Government aeroplanes from the Hempstead aviation field to the League Island Navy Yard, Philadelphia, which was postponed from Dec. 16, will start at 8:30 tomorrow morning. It will be under the auspices of the Aviation Section of the Army Signal Corps, and will allow several aviators to qualify for their reserve officers' flying certificate.

Captain J. E. Carberry will be flight commander, assisted by Captain W. G. Kilner. Captain Carberry's machine will be the first to take the air, and he will be followed by Captain Kilner. . . The fliers will leave the field at intervals of two minutes. The order in which the others will start will be:

No. 8—Lieutenant D. [B.] Osborne, First Aero Company.⁵⁰

The flight will be observed by Captain A. I. Rader, U. S. A., and Inspector C. J. Lyon of the First Aero Company, N. G. N. Y. The aviators will be the guests at dinner tomorrow night of the officers of the Atlantic Reserve Fleet, and will leave Philadelphia for Mineola at 8:30 o'clock Sunday morning.⁵¹

All the pilots wore heavy fur and wool clothing and wore goggles. Their cheeks were the only parts exposed to the air. Each aeroplane carried twenty-five to thirty gallons of gasoline. All the men completing the flight and the return trip were qualified as expert aviators.⁵²



(C) *International Film Service.*

ARMY AVIATORS AND INSTRUCTORS READY FOR THE MINEOLA-PHILADELPHIA FLIGHT.

The Group Includes: Captain Joseph E. Carberry, Captain R. C. Holling, Lieutenant J. E. Miller, Lieutenant W. G. Kilner, Lieutenant N. Carolin, Sergeant E. W. Noyes, Sergeant E. A. Kruss, Corporal H. H. Salmon, J. B. Stetson, Jr., G. Osborn, E. W. Bagnell, A. M. Coyle, P. C. (Tex) Millman, H. W. Blakeley and Leonard W. Bonney.

Bee Osborne is the sixth from the left, in the above photograph.



Photograph taken of the aviators attempting to warm-up on their arrival in Philadelphia. None of the men are identified.⁵³

Return Flight This Morning.

The return flight from the Navy Yard to Hempstead Field will be begun at 9 o'clock to-morrow morning and every one of the eight here is confident of completing the round trip.

On the way to this city altitudes of from 2,000 to 5,000 feet were attained. Tests of stabilizers and of other devices were made. The general results of the adventurous expedition are said to have been very satisfactory to the Government experts and other squadron flights will be attempted in the near future.⁵⁴

Army Aviators Nearly Frozen in Long Flight Begin Tests at Altitude of 8,000 Feet to Qualify for Pilot Licenses.

New York, Dec. 31.—Almost frozen by their 165-mile flight at an altitude of from 7,000 to 8,000 feet, the army aviators making the test flights to qualify for pilot licenses began volplaning⁵⁵ into Hempstead Plains, L. I., this afternoon. Lieutenant James E. Miller of the New York National Guard was the first aviator to reach the field after successfully completing the round trip. Soon afterward Corporal H. Salmon brought his aeroplane to the turf. . .

The aviators started from the Philadelphia Navy Yard shortly before noon, all of them being sent away in rapid succession. They flew up the Delaware River and then followed a railroad line across New Jersey. Approaching New York City they raised their altitude to 8,000 feet and passed over Staten Island and South Brooklyn.

At the altitude of 1,000 feet the aviators encountered zero temperature, and as the entire flight of 165 miles was made at high altitudes the experience was a severe one. The aviators were whitened with frost and were suffering from the keen exposure in spite of the heavy aviation clothing in which they were muffled. When they reached the aviation field at Hempstead they had to be assisted from their aeroplanes.

Flying toward their destination from Brooklyn, the airplanes continued at high altitudes until over Belmont Park, where they volplaned from an altitude of 6,000 feet. In order to come in with the wind, the aviators circled about over the Meadowbrook Hunt Club and made their landings at the Aviation field in good style.

The clear, brilliant skies made the return of the aviators a great Sunday afternoon attraction for all of that part of Long Island surrounding Hempstead Plains. Long before the time for the aviators to arrive hundreds of automobile parties drove out to Hempstead Plains, to Garden City and to the Meadowbrook Hunt Club.

The Garden City Hotel was overrun with sightseers and many parties at the hunt club made the event a New Year's advance celebration.

The aviators who made the start in the return of the airplanes to Long Island were . . . Lieutenant G. [B.] Osborne; . . .⁵⁶

Certificates Granted:

Tests for these Expert Certificates were made at the Signal Corps Aviation Station, Mineola, Long Island, N. Y., the machines used being Curtiss J. N. Tractor and Thomas Tractor, both equipped with Curtiss OX motors.

Aviation:

No. 623, Lieut. B. R. Osborne, Signal Corps, Aviation Station, Mineola, N. Y., Curtiss JN 4; Curtiss XO 2, 90 H.P. motor.⁵⁷



Three Standard Model H-3 Tractors at the Signal Corps Aviation Station, Mineola, L. I., Designed by Charles H. Day.

Aeroplanes at Mineola, L. I., 1916. *Aviation and Aeronautical Engineering Journal*, Jan. 1917.

1917

Bee Osborne resigned his commission as a Second Lieutenant in the Kentucky National Guard's Third Infantry Regiment on 15 January 1917, to transfer to the U. S. Army Signal Corps Officers' Reserve Corps.

State of Kentucky

Adjutant General's Office

Special Orders No. 05

Frankfort, Ky., January 15, 1917.

1. The resignation of 2nd Lieutenant Bee Osborne, Co. H, 3rd Kentucky Infantry, having been accepted by the President to take effect January 12, 1917, as per Par. 15, S. O. No. 10, WD., his name is dropped from the roster of officers of the Kentucky National Guard as of that date and a vacancy declared to exist in the office held by him.

By Order of the Governor:

[J. Tandy Ellis]

The Adjutant General.

WDGO [War Department General Order] 1, 9 Feb 1917:

General Order No. 21, dated 09 February 1917, authorized the organization of the 3rd Aero Squadron located near San Antonio, Texas. Osborne received orders to report to the Third Aero Squadron on 15 March 1917.] Officers added up to 06 April 1917 were: 1st Lt. Bee R. Osborne, . . . AS, SORC.⁵⁸

On 15 March 1917, First Lieutenant Bee R. Osborne was order to active duty in the Air Service, from the Officer Reserve Corps.

Army Officers' Reserve Corps.

Following is a list of persons in the various departments whose acceptance of appointment in the Officers' Reserve Corps have been received since the list was last furnished, March 2: Eastern Department.

Osborne, Bee R., 1st Lieut.; 8; signal (aviation section), 514 W. High Street, Lexington, Ky. [*Army and Navy Register*, 17 March 1917, p. 321.]

He was listed in Army orders published in the *Washington Post* on 20 March 1917, as being assigned to the Aviation Section, Signal Officers' Reserve Corps, transferred to active duty and ordered to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, assigned to the Third Aero Squadron, Signal Corps for duty.⁵⁹ His service record indicates he was assigned to the 1st Aero Squadron until 09 September 1917.

1st Lieut. Bee R. Osborne, aviation section, reserve corps, is assigned to active duty and will proceed to Fort Sam Houston and report to the commanding officer, 3d Aero Squadron, for duty. W. D., March 15. [*Army and Navy Register*, 24 March 1917, p. 352.]

Men and Matters

Lieutenant B. Osborne, of Lexington, formerly in the Kentucky National Guard, will leave today for San Antonio, Tex., where he will enter the aviation section of the Signal Corps at Fort Sam Houston. Lieutenant Osborne has already received his commission as first lieutenant in the regular army.⁶⁰

Lexington Man

B. R. Osborne Appointed Aviator in Signal Corps Reserves.

Washington, March 21.—Brig. Gen. Henry P. McCain, U. S. A., the Adjutant General of the Army, announced Monday that Bee R. Osborne, of 514 West High Street, Lexington, has accepted an appointment as an aviator in the Signal Corps Reserves. The Kentuckian will have the rank of First Lieutenant, Officers' Reserve Corps. He will not be called upon for active service except in the event of war.⁶¹

Lexington Boy Is Named Reserve Military Aviator

Lieutenant Bee R. Osborne, of 514 West High Street, who recently received his license as reserve military aviator, has been appointed as aviator with the Signal Corps Reserves with the rank of First Lieutenant of the Officers Reserve Corps. Announcement of the appointment was made at Washington by Brigadier General Henry P. McCain, Adjutant General of the army.

Lieutenant Osborne, since the completion of his course, has been in Lexington. He has planned to organize in Lexington an aviation company. In his new capacity he will not be called upon for active service except in the event of war.⁶²

On 06 April 1917, the United States entered into the World War. The United States began the World War with 35 pilots and 51 student pilots on its rosters.⁶³ Like the rest of the Army, the Aviation Section concluded that training Reserve officers was the solution to its manpower needs.

The entrance of the United States into the war in April 1917 found the country almost totally unprepared in aeronautical experience, equipment, and personnel. The Aviation Section of the Signal Corps had no accurate knowledge of the equipment of a military airplane. No airplane in America up to 1917 had ever mounted a machine gun, and aviation personnel had practically no knowledge of radiotelegraphy and telephony, photography, bombing equipment, lights for night flying, aviators' clothing, compasses used in flying, or other aviation instruments well known to the aviators of Germany, England, and France.⁶⁴

Aviation Section, Reserve Corps.

Each of the following named officers is announced as on duty that requires him to participate regularly and frequently in aerial flights from the date specified: 1st Lieuts. Bee R. Osborne, Edgar W. Bagnell, Birdeye B. Lewis, April 9; Harold M. Gallop, April 10. W. D., May 5. [*Army and Navy Register*, 12 May 1917, p. 558.]

Army Orders.

The following aviation officers are assigned to and will join their respective organizations at Fort Sam Houston, Texas: Fourth Aero Squadron, Signal Corps: . . . First Lieutenant B. R. Osborne, Aviation Section, S.O.R.C.⁶⁵

Army Orders

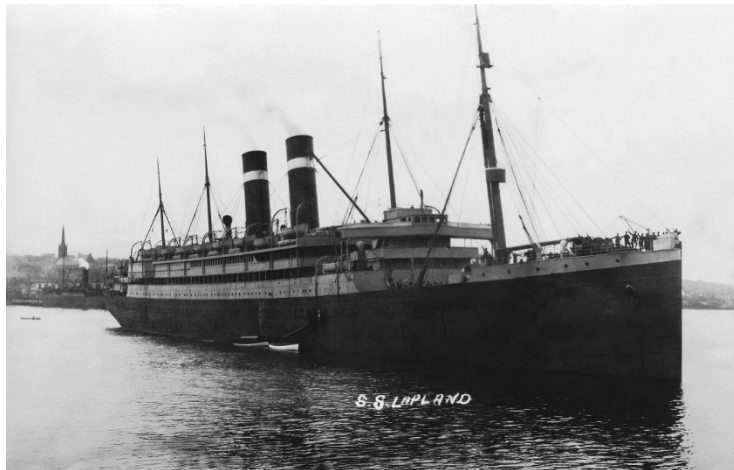
First Lieut. Bee R. Osborne, 4th Aero Squadron, Aviation Section, S.O.R.C. to Columbus to 1st Aero Squadron, S. C. for duty. (June 18, S.D.)⁶⁶

Osborne's next stop was San Antonio, Texas. Osborne left San Antonio in August 1917, headed for Fort Hamilton, New York. Prior to his leaving San Antonio, Osborne had been at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio and Columbus, New Mexico. A cablegram 05 August 1917, to General Pershing at Paris, mentions Osborne and other officers who had orders to sail to France, awaiting transport.⁶⁷

Osborne sailed from Hoboken, New Jersey, on 13 August 1917 bound for France. In a 1939 interview with a Lexington newspaper, Osborne states he received overseas orders in June, and that he left the States aboard the S. S. *Lapland* on 16 July. However, in April 1917, she was mined off the English coast near Liverpool, where she was able to reach. In June the *Lapland* was requisitioned and converted to a troopship. The first group sent to France, aboard the converted troopship were aviators of the 1st Aero Squadron, the first unit of the United States Army Air Corps to arrive in France.⁶⁸

Notes from Gotham

New York, Aug. 18.— . . . Lieut. B. R. Osborne, of Lexington, Ky., entertained a number of friends at dinner in the Claridge Hotel last Sunday evening.⁶⁹



Troopship S. S. *Lapland* in which Bee sailed from New York to France, in August 1917. Cape Breton Military History Collection.

In France, Bee was initially assigned to the Radio Section of the Air Corps located at Villacoublay near Paris.

Air Service, American Expeditionary Forces was created on 03 September 1917 (AEF G.O. No. 31), the service would be demobilized in 1919.

In October 1918, the U. S. Air Service, Technical Section was established. During the first month of operation, Lt. Osborne was placed in charge of Aviators equipment.

Historical Account of the Radio Section, U. S. Air Service Electrical Division, Technical Section (October 1917 to April 1918)

. . . Some preliminary investigations of electrical and radio apparatus were made during October and November 1917 by Lieut. B. R. Osborne and Lieut. Young. . .

The investigations comprised visits to the various experimental and installation fields of the French Air Service, to the manufacture of airplane and ground lighting equipment, to the manufacture of heated clothing, to the Technical Section of the Etablissement Central de Radio Telegraphie Militaire of the French Government, and to the manufacturers of airplanes.

The material investigated covered the following principal types of apparatus that were in use by the French Aviation or proposed for their service, and was well planned. . .

- a) Airplane lighting and heating equipment including fan-driven generators.
- b) Airplane projectors for landing at night.
- c) Airplane projectors for signaling.
- d) Storage batteries.
- e) Electrical heated and fireproof clothing.
- f) Illuminating trucks for field lighting.
- g) Acetylene field illuminating equipment and portable compression plant.
- h) Eclipse shutter location lights.
- i) Radio apparatus.⁷⁰

On 01 December 1917, Osborne was promoted to First Lieutenant. During this time back in the States, work had begun on building America's first fighter plane, the DH-4, Liberty:

Test First U. S. Battle Aero.

The first fighting airplane wholly made in America of American materials has taken the air in successful test flights. In making this fact known recently the officials of the aircraft production board said few changes in the design of either the plane or the Liberty motor are believed necessary, and that production in quantity of the fighting machines soon will be in progress in many factories.

By the first of the new year it is expected that the aircraft program will be well under way and by July 1 the Government expects to be able to supply any demands of its allies.

Machines which United States forces in Europe will need when spring comes are being built abroad. [*Army and Navy Register*, 10 November 1917, p. 594.]

1918

From 11 May 1918, when the first American-built aircraft arrived in France, to the close of hostilities, a total of 1,087 DH-4 airplanes were assembled at the center, of this number 543 were sent to the front. During this same period the center was able to salvage 308 planes and a great number of engines. At the close of the war, the center covered 50 acres of floor space, 509 acres of prepared flying field, and 12,000 officers and soldiers.⁷¹

Lieutenant Osborne would eventually be assigned as Chief Test Pilot and commander of the 1106th Aero Squadron, located at Air Service Production Center No. 2, Romorantin, France. This production center was the most important Air Service project. Captain Osborne and his squadron were part of the Airplane and Motor Division of the Supply Center of the Air Corps. The center planned, maintained, and operated by the Supply Section, was in itself a huge industrial enterprise. It was here that the DH-4 liberty airplanes received from the United States were assembled, tested, and equipped with all accessories.

History of Plant 1-A, Airplane Assembly Production & Maintenance Division Supply Section Air Service American Expeditionary Forces, France

1. Purpose of Department. The purpose of Assembly Plant 1-A and the Liberty Flying Field is the receiving of all De Havilland – Four airplanes shipped from the United States, the assembling, testing and delivery, equipped as ordered ready for service, to the various points of shipment. The different equipment consisting of day and night bombers, reglage, observation and school planes.
2. Date of Organization. The first de Havilland – 4 was received at the incompleated [sic] Plant 1-A on May 8th, 1918. A temporary organization was formed by officers and men from the different departments of Air Service Production Center No. 2. Difficulty was encountered in unloading the cases from the cars, as no crane was available. The plane was assembled in the first three steel bays of the building, which was all that was completed at that time. Having no knowledge of the method employed in packing this ship, the process of unpacking and assembling was quite slow. There being at this time no motor test blocks erected, the motor test was accomplished inside the building. From the receipt and assembly of the first plane until the permanent organization was formed, (on or about June 20th), numerous other ships were received and assembled, and from the experience gained thereby, necessary plant equipment was devised and constructed.
3. The first plane assembled was taken to the Flying Field, which at that time had only a temporary tent hanger with a capacity of one plane, and on the afternoon of May 18th, 1918, the first American made airplane to leave French soil was christened and flown, the event being witnessed by official representatives of the A. E. F. and French Army, and motion pictures taken.
4. Officers in Charge of Various Departments at Beginning of Organization, and Duties of Each. The permanent organization formed about June 20th consisted of the following officers, whose duties are given:
1st Lieut. Bee R. Osborne was in charge of the flight testing at the Flying Field. The pilots then assigned to the Field were: 1st Lt. H. Rowe, 1st Lt. L. V. Clark, 1st Lt.

E. B. Bayley, 2nd Lt. Otto Ferguson, 1st Lt. L. L. Rounds, 1st Lt. H. C. Rorison, and 2nd Lt. H. L. Campbell.

Capt. A. A. R. Scheleon, Officer I. C. Flying at Liberty Flying Field.

1st Lt. Bee R. Osborne, Asst. O.I.C. Flying.

Tester & Ferry Pilots

1st Lt. B. W. Maynard, Tester & Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. F. L. Walker, Tester & Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. H. L. Campbell, Tester and Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. T. D. Parsons, Tester and Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. A. Fairchild, Test Pilot.

Ferry Pilots

Capt. H. B. Flounders, Ferry Pilot.

Capt. W. W. Spain, Ferry Pilot.

Capt. A. Stroupe, Ferry Pilot.

Capt. H. T. Wilson, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. A. F. Akers, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. A. F. Baker, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. E. B. Bayley, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. B. G. Bird, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. T. W. Blackburn, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. J. D. Boucher, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. C. E. Brown, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. R. P. Brown, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. L. V. Clark, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. E. W. Day, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. K. de V Fastenau, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. O. Ferguson, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. E. A. Georgi, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. J. R. Hockert, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. A. K. Humphries, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. M. W. Johnson, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. F. L. Johnstone, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. H. Jones, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. W. B. Kelly, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. J. W. Kunneke, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. C. C. Lange, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. W. C. McCabe, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. W. B. McCoy, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. M. F. Lee, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. H. D. LeMar, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. G. B. Lucy, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. H. S. Manchester, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. C. F. Morgan, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. S. K. Nash, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. J. A. Parrish, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. D. J. Pepin, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. P. C. Porter, Ferry pilot.

1st Lt. C. B. Rapp, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. H. Rowe, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. G. F. Rupp, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. W. C. Sansom, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. C. W. Schweizer, Ferry Pilot.

1st Lt. J. H. Ward, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. J. F. Hardie, Test Pilot.

2nd Lt. H. W. Scott, Test Pilot.

2nd Lt. P. V. Hoerr, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. G. S. Sinclair, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. J. A. Giddings, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. A. L. Shreve, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. T. R. Towne, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. H. A. Steiner, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. R. F. Whitfield, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. A. S. Young, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. J. K. Johnson, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. C. H. Fargo, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. W. A. Miller, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. G. B. Wilkins, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. W. B. Farris, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. C. A. Rice, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. J. S. Spaulding, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. R. J. Stahl, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. P. E. Cross, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. E. Bedell, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. T. L. Beattie, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. S. Sutton, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. E. O. Thompson, Ferry Pilot.

2nd Lt. E. P. Frost, Ferry Pilot.

Additionally, the unit had three casualties:

Lt. Potter, 01 August 1917, near Orly.

Lt. Cary, 04 September 1917, near Chatillon

Lt. Middlehoff, 15 September 1917, near Chatillon

It was stated in the report that the average total man-hours a plane was on the Flying Field was 51.40.⁷²

18 May 1918 – first flight of an American-built aeroplane, the DH-4 Liberty Plane is made at Romorantin Aerodrome. First Lieutenant Bee R. Osborne was pilot of this historic flight.



This photograph of the first flight ceremony would appear in newspapers across the country during July 1918.

Two days after the historic flight, Osborne was promoted to Captain in the Air Service, 20 May 1918.

On 24 June 1918, at a meeting of the Production & Maintenance Division, Major Allen stated,

“Some of the duties of Capt. Osborne, in charge of the flying field, among which are: He is responsible for all planes after they have left the assembly plant; he will operate gang to take care of crashed planes; and will have under his direction all test and transfer pilots.” Osborne stated that he had need for transfer and 5 test pilots; also 6 more mechanics for operation of gang to go out on crashes. He also listed his transportation requirements, 1 touring car, 1 motor cycle, 2 Fiat trucks, and 2 trailers.⁷³

During the 27 June meeting, Osborne advises that he needs 12 more men.⁷⁴

In a letter home from James B. Wallace, of Lexington, printed in the 10 June 1918, edition of the *Lexington Leader*, mention is made of Osborne. Wallace and Osborne had served together in Company A:

“I saw Captain Bee Osborne and had a long talk with him, in fact, I spent several hours in his office in Paris. He is chief inspector of aeroplane engines of

the A. E. F. That is quite a big job over here and tho he realizes the importance of his position, Captain Osborne is the same old Bee.⁷⁵

Song of the Liberty Plane.

The Liberty battle plane over the sea
Is hunting the Boche in the air,
Where the sun cannot shine for the gray rolling smoke
Or the moon for the red, leaping glare.
She carries the hopes of the world on her wings
And she speeds in the wake of her prey,
For the flag has caressed her, and Freedom has blessed her,
And Glory has pointed the way.

The Liberty flyer is roaring aloft
To victory up in the sky.
She is teaching the Hun with her little old gun
That her motto is conquer or die.
She is singing a song as she whizzes along
With a brave U. S. soldier to man her,
For the planes as they sail in the teeth of the gale
Are humming "The Star-Spangled Banner."
—Minna Irving, in *New York Herald*.⁷⁶

War Song Written from Miss Irving's Poem in Herald.

"The Song of the Liberty Plane," one of the best of the patriotic poems by Miss Minna Irving which have been published from time to time in the *Herald*, has been set to music by George Sweet and has met such a responsive chord that it soon will be heard by the soldiers in France. It is a March song.

The poem, inspired by the advent at the French front of the liberty motor, appeared on the editorial page of the *Herald* on March 17, and was put to musical setting by Mr. Sweet a few weeks ago. It had its first hearing on September in connection with a patriotic playlet, "The Dream of Wings," which was produced by Miss Cora Remington.

The enthusiastic reception given the song and poem on that occasion prompted Miss Remington to write to Mr. Sweet:

"Your splendid song is in the spirit of the text. The aviation officers who helped the performance said it was a 'corker,' and want me to give it in Mineola. I shall sing it everywhere I sing during the coming season, for I consider it the best song of the war."

"The Song of the Liberty Plane" next will be heard at Camp Upton on Tuesday, when the composer will sing it.

Lucien Muratore, a leading tenor of the Chicago Opera Company, has taken a copy of the manuscript with him to France, with the intention of singing it to the soldiers. Miss Alice Neilsen will sing it on her concert tour. The song has been accepted by the New York Police Glee Club, and S. L. Safford, organist of St. George's Church, will play it in the coming Liberty loan campaign. "The Song of

the Liberty Plane” has been dedicated by the composer to the Aero Club of America.⁷⁷

The Stars and Stripes, 27 December 1918, p. 4.

The Advent

(Inspired by the trial flight of the first Liberty plane to be flown in France, May 17, 1918.)

“Coupe!”

The pilot, peeping from his cock-pit,
Grimaces, and tries again.

“Contact!”

Three mechanics tug, chain-like, at the huge propeller;
The engine roars, insane.
The ship moves forward, her nose lifts gracefully into the air;
And as the swaying, expectant crowd
Cheers, and cheers again, the Chaplain
Bowed,

Murmurs a prayer.

B. C. Clarke, Corp., 486th Aero Squadron.

OVER THERE



First train load of American Planes to arrive "Over There"-All D.H.4's from our plant, May.13,1918.



Assembling the first Fuselage May 16, 1918.



Above train load of our Planes, after unloading in France.



Captain Osborn about to fly the first Plane May 17, 1918.



Manufacturers for the United States Government
The Dayton Wright Airplane Co.
DAYTON, OHIO.
"The Birthplace of the Airplane"



1919 to 1920

Fliers in Minor Rank

Higher Commissions Bestowed on Men in Ground Service

Casualties Attributed to Defective Planes Bought From France.

U. S. Accepted Aircraft on Inspection by French Officers—Practice Later Corrected—

German Spies Active at Aviation Bases.

Airplanes for the Yankee fighters at the front, both of American make and those purchased abroad of the French and British were delivered by the “ferry service,” which was a distinct branch, and one in which many of our best fliers rendered splendid and continuous service, without gaining fame.

The headquarters of this service was just outside of Paris, and a considerable number of these men took part in the defense of the French capital when it was being subjected, on every clear night, to attacks from the German avions. Their exploits against the gothas constitute a separate chapter in the brilliant history of American aviation in France.

The chief of the “ferry service” was and presumably still is, Capt. B. R. Osborne, of Lexington, Ky., one of the most experienced of the many expert American fliers in Europe, who generally have received no adequate recognition of their magnificent work.

Minor Rank for Real Fliers.

It is an illuminating commentary upon the organization of the aviation service that men like Osborne and Eddie Rickenbacker, and many more like them, who day after day took their lives in their hands, found themselves at the close of the war holding the rank of mere captains, while West Pointers who did most of their work on the ground far outranked them as majors and colonels.

Expert fliers, many of them the finest types of Americans I had the honor of seeing abroad, who went to France early in the war, never received the promotion to which they were abundantly entitled. Some of them, who had been far enough advanced in flying to act as instructors in the United States before crossing the sea to engage in actual flight against the enemy, later had the humiliation to see their former pupils, who had remained in America for months after their departure, arrive in France to be their superior officers.

Fairness Essential to Morale.

This system by no stretch of the imagination could be called a good thing for the aviation service. Favoritism and “pull” in the United States were believed to count more than hard work and actual experience gained against the enemy. After having talked with American aviators all over France, there is no doubt in my mind that gross injustice has been done to some of our most self-sacrificing soldiers. I believe that the first essential in the reorganization of the aviation section is the reparation of these wrongs. Otherwise, good men who have done the work of flying should be given the rank to which they are entitled, and if officers of the army clique are found to be holding positions to which others are rightfully entitled, they should be made to step aside. Until aviation is put on a basis of fairness and justice it can never be 100 per cent efficient.

Capt. Osborne’s Case Typical.

The case of Capt. Osborne is directly to the point. Why should a man who for months was in charge of the important work of delivering planes to the squadrons at the front be a captain, while there are regular army colonels in aviation in the United States who never showed any interest in aviation until they saw in it a chance for higher rank and increased pay?

I want to say that Capt. Osborne never made any such complaint as this to me. I simply cite his case as typical. He was the “test pilot” and “acceptance pilot,” with heavy responsibilities involving the lives of his comrades of the sky. He accepted the first 600 airplanes obtained from the French at Villacoublay. These were Nieuports and Spads, and the time was from January to March 1918.

Defective Planes Given Americans.

Some of these planes we obtained from the French were defective, according to information I received at widely separated places from different fliers, none of whom knew what others had told me. Their stories agreed, and I think there is no question about it. Our airmen used planes that French airmen would not fly in, and the cemeteries at our flying fields in France bear mute witness today to the costliness of this in human life.

Of the “28-Nieuports” we bought from the French a number proved very bad. As explained to me by our fliers, the vibration caused the gasoline [line] to break just over the magneto, which set the planes on fire and caused a good many deaths. I have seen two airplanes come down in flames, both, I am glad to say, being boche—one at Montdidier, in May, and the other in the Argonne, in October.

I can appreciate what it means for a man to find himself in a burning plane at an altitude of 10,000 or 15,000 feet. To require men to fly in defective planes is to invite them to certain death. I believe it to be susceptible of proof that our airmen at the front have flatly refused to fly in some of the planes provided for them.

A year ago we were buying planes from the French, which were inspected by the French. We paid the French for inspecting their own planes that they were selling to us, and there was no American inspection. Some of the defects were difficult to detect, and fliers generally learned of them when they were several thousand feet in the air.

I made a formal statement about this to the War Department when I returned from my first visit to France, although I wrote nothing about it. Whether as a result of this or not I do not know, but later this system was changed, and American inspection was substituted for French inspection.

Spies at Aviation Bases.

Maj. Lufbery,⁷⁸ at the time of his death the leading American “ace,” was killed in a “28-Nieuport,” and aviators believe that he was a victim of a defective plane. Quentin Roosevelt, I have been told, was killed in a 13-Spad, with a 300-horse-power Hispano-Suisa motor.

German spies gave us a good deal of trouble at our aviation bases in France, and mysterious things frequently happened to our planes, nuts and bolts being sawed nearly off, so that the slightest strain would bring the planes crashing to earth. The first Liberty motor to reach France was guarded night and day by eight second lieutenants, the authorities being unwilling to trust it to the care of soldiers.

The first Liberty was tested on March 24, 1918—the first Liberties having arrived in France in March, and not in May, as I inadvertently stated on Thursday morning—and the pilot was Capt. Osborne.⁷⁹

Reliable, but Has Defects.

The motor was in bombing Brequet, which attained an altitude of 18,000 feet in 24 minutes, the fastest time ever made by a Brequet plane.⁸⁰ The first plane was never at the front.

I spent an evening with Capt. Osborne in a little French inn one night in December, and I asked him about the Liberty, for he had flown in a great many since making the first flight. I asked him if he would tell me what he thought of the Liberty plane, and if he would let me quote him, and he said he would. Substantially, this is what he said:

“I think the Liberty motor is the best motor in the world at this time. It is the most reliable. But it has two serious defects as a battle plane. One defect is that the tank separates the pilot and the observer.”

Three Targets Offered Enemy.

This substantiates what I had been told before by Liberty fliers who had been wounded at the front. The pilot and observer were so far apart that, owing to the roar of the engine, they could not communicate with each other when in flight. To obviate this some of the planes were equipped with telephone instruments, but this was not perfected.

“The second defect,” said Capt. Osborne, “is that the tank being situated between the pilot and the observer, three targets in a line are presented to the enemy gunners. This is not so with respect to any other motor. Why they put the tank in the most vulnerable and exposed spot is more than I can say. This has resulted in unusually heavy casualties among fliers in Liberty planes. These tanks have been hit in action repeatedly by incendiary bullets, and many planes have been lost and the aviators killed. For this reason many aviators did not like to go up in Liberty planes at the front.

Lacked Knowledge of Air Fighting.

“The Liberty motor is a good motor, but the designers did not understand aerial fighting.”

There is one army story, told with gusto at the front, especially by the infantry that illustrates the system whereby high commissions did not always go to the most experienced fliers.

According to this yarn, there was an American squadron at the front, south of Metz, and along with the British. One day the weather was not good for flying, but the commanding officer of the American squadron, a regular army major, insisted upon making a flight, although warned not to do so by the most experienced British airmen.

“What About the Major?”

The Yankee squadron went over the German lines, got into difficulties, and the whole outfit had to come down behind the enemy positions, and were gobbled up.

There was great anxiety that night on our side, but the suspense was relieved the next day when the boche sent over an observer, who dropped a message. It read, with hitherto unsuspected Teutonic humor:

“Captured all seven of the fliers and will intern them—but what’ll we do with the major?”

Now that the war is over the aviation service can be reorganized for the future on a basis of splendid efficiency. We have developed in actual flight against the enemy some of the finest fliers in the world. But what’ll we do with the major?⁸¹

Captain Osborne served in France until late August 1919. On 29 August, the three officers and 121 men of the 1106th Aero Squadron sailed aboard the S. S. *Princess Matoika* from Brest, France, headed for Hoboken, New Jersey, and home. On 07 September, the ship docked at Pier 7.⁸²

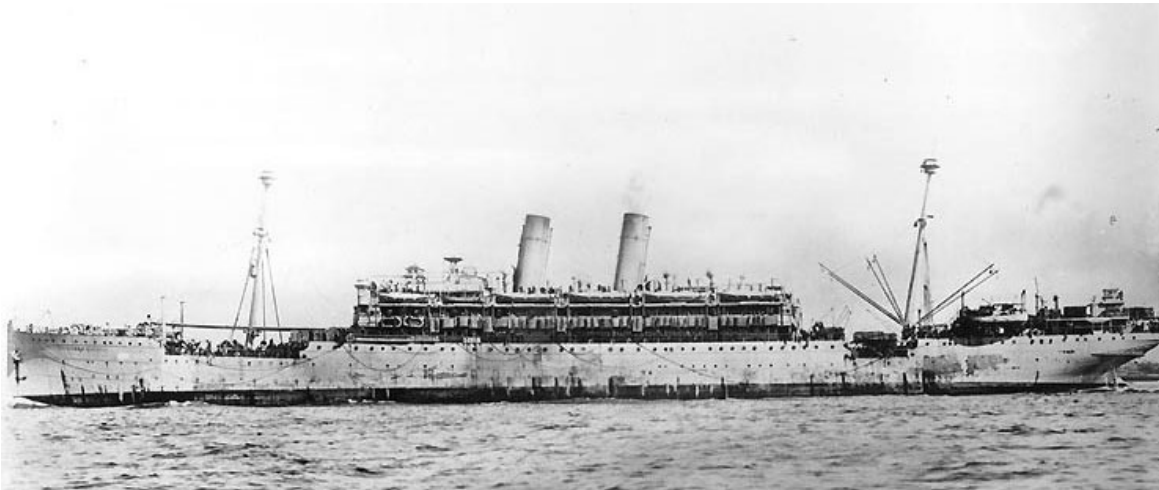
Bee Osborne

Lexington Man, First to Test Liberty Motor in France, Reaches New York.

New York, Sept. 8.—Two transports arrived Sunday from France, bringing nearly 1,000 officers and men.

The *Princess Matoika*, formerly the German passenger liner *Princess Alice*, brought Capt. B. R. Osborne, Lexington, Ky., who commanded a squadron consisting of two officers and 121 men.

Capt. Osborne was the first army officer to test the Liberty motor in France.⁸³



SS *Princess Matoika* in 1919.

Following his return from overseas, Bee was stationed at Bolling Field, Washington, D.C., beginning on 18 September 1919, at the time the Army was authorized to retain 1,200 temporary emergency officers in the Air Service while Congress determined how the peacetime service would be structured. The emergency officers were to be retained until 30 June 1920.⁸⁴ Captain Osborne was honorably discharged at Fort Thomas, Kentucky, on 13 September 1920. He was not recorded as having served in any battles or engagements despite his time in France. He was awarded the Victory Medal and four gold war service chevrons.

Air Service—Maj. Gen. C. T. Menoher, Chief of Air Service.

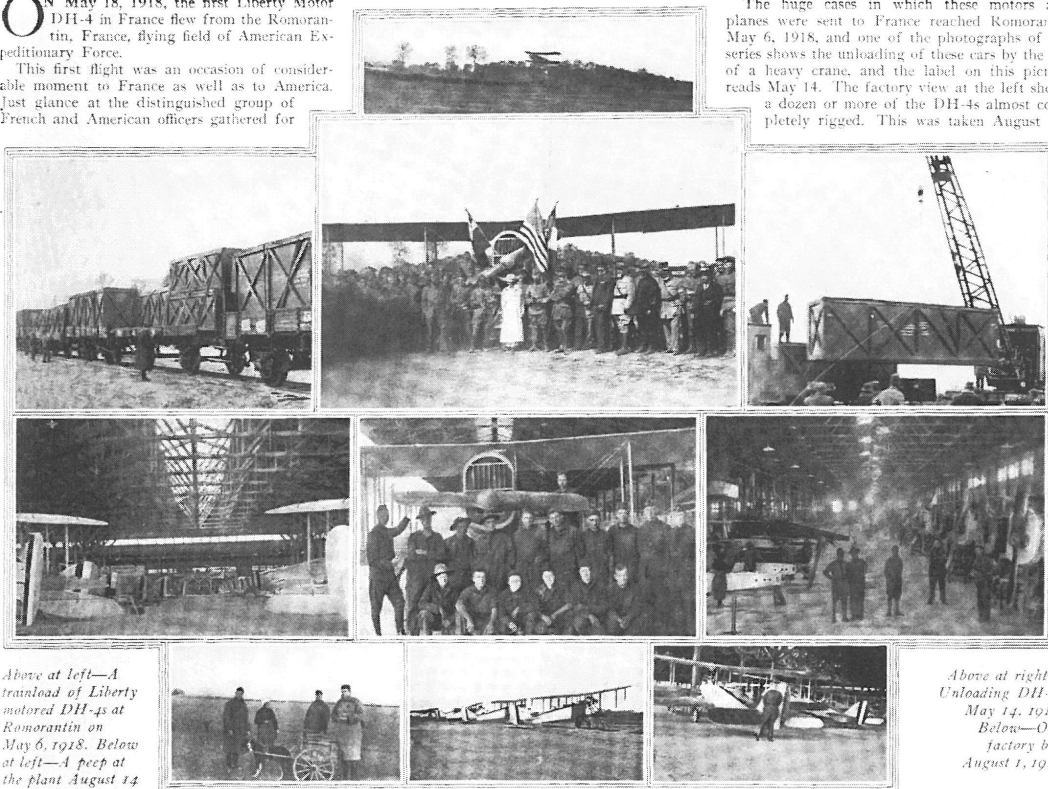
Capt. Bee R. Osborne, honorably discharged. [*Army and Navy Register*, 03 October 1920, p. 356.]

First Liberty Motored DH-4s in France

ON May 18, 1918, the first Liberty Motor DH-4 in France flew from the Romorantin, France, flying field of American Expeditionary Force.

This first flight was an occasion of considerable moment to France as well as to America. Just glance at the distinguished group of French and American officers gathered for

The huge cases in which these motors and planes were sent to France reached Romorantin May 6, 1918, and one of the photographs of the series shows the unloading of these cars by the use of a heavy crane, and the label on this picture reads May 14. The factory view at the left shows a dozen or more of the DH-4s almost completely rigged. This was taken August 14,



Above at left—A trainload of Liberty motored DH-4s at Romorantin on May 6, 1918. Below at left—A peep at the plant August 14

Above at right—Unloading DH-4s May 14, 1918. Below—One factory bay August 1, 1918

Top—First flight of Liberty Motored DH-4 in Romorantin, France, May 18, 1918. Central illustration—Christening of the plane before the flight. Below it—The men who completed assembling of this plane, May 17, Romorantin, France, assembly plant. Small views at bottom—A daughter of France, her dog cart and American officers, Maj. A. L. Ellwood at right; a squadron of DH-4s on the Romorantin flying field waiting to be ferried to the front; one bay of the Romorantin assembly plant, again Maj. Ellwood

the christening, which took place just before the first flight.

Unhappily, THE MARMON NEWS, though it has the pleasure of presenting these views to the public for the first time, has not the roll of honor of the guests who were present upon that historic occasion. Particularly with the main central picture, which shows the christening of the plane, we are unable to supply the names of the distinguished French and American officers, who can easily be seen in the front rank of the group. We do not even know the name of the dainty lady in white who christened the plane and presented the bouquet of flowers to the pilot who was given the honor of flying the first Liberty Motored DH-4 plane to cleave the skies of France.

Of no less historic importance is the group of men immediately below the celebration event—the seventeen who completed the assembly of this first Liberty Motor equipped DH-4 plane in France. If we are not mistaken, the man at the extreme right is Captain Charles Merz.

Unfortunately Major A. L. Ellwood, through whose courtesy we present these views, does not

appear in any of these pictures, with the exception of the smaller ones, and these are so indistinct that it is not possible to make a very good cut from the photograph. Major Ellwood, as many MARMON NEWS readers know, was the manager of the Kansas City branch of the Nordyke & Marmon Company until he entered the service, became a major and was sent to France in charge of the assembly engine test and flying field at Romorantin. Its flying field contains more than 500 acres, and the plant and assembly depot covers more than 1,000,000 feet of space.

Some conception of the size of this plant may be obtained from two or three of the views that give vistas of small sections of the plant—"bays", they call them. Each of the DH-4s had a wing spread of forty-six feet "and sixteen DH-4s could be rigged at one time, and there were twelve such bays".

The important pictures of the flight on the christening day were taken on May 18, 1918, and the photograph of the completion of the assembly (of the first Liberty Motor DH-4 received in France) on May 17.

while the interior of the DH-4 Plant A-1, at right, was taken August 1, 1918. These dates, we believe, may prove enlightening to those who recall certain controversies regarding the arrival of American-made planes in France.

That work in France was not all dull, grinding toil may be seen by a glimpse at a picture of Major Ellwood and two brother officers enjoying the society of a French mother who has just dismounted from her little dog cart to talk to these husky, good-natured American officers, who were putting things over in the airline for Uncle Sam and La Belle France.

MR. DUNCAN BERIE, secretary of Louisiana's highway department, proposes to drive his MARMON 34 touring car from New Orleans over the proposed Jefferson Highway to Winnipeg, Canada. In his party will be the governor of Louisiana and his wife.

There is much interest in the south in this and other north and south highways which will open up new routes in the Mississippi Valley and make possible more direct drives to the central states.

1921 to 1968

Osborne returned to Kentucky following his service in the Army. He began a new career working as a ticket agent and telegrapher for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway System and retired from the C&O in 1951. He and his family quietly settled into civilian life.

He would remain interested in flying and worked with his fellow World War aviators, over the next few years in an attempt to get an aviation unit for the Kentucky National Guard to be located at Lexington.

Airmen Form Organization J. O. Creech Heads Associated Aviators of Kentucky; Favor State Guard Air Unit Here Will Be Incorporated

The first step toward forming a permanent organization of airmen in Lexington and the Blue Grass to endorse the prospect of this city becoming the center of aviation activities in the State as well as an important link in the transcontinental air routes, as announced several days ago by Adjutant General Jackson Morris, was taken yesterday when Central Kentucky pilots organized the Associated Aviators of Kentucky.

A resolution was passed to write to Adjutant General Morris to pledge the support of the club in his effort to establish the aviation unit here.

Lieutenant J. O. Creech, at whose instance the meeting was called, was elected president until the permanent organization is effected. Immediate steps will be taken to incorporate the club.

Other temporary officers elected were: R. E. L. Murphy, vice president and J. W. Davis, secretary treasurer. A temporary executive committee was chosen—including the foregoing officers, and B. R. Osborne, T. N. House and A. H. Fleck.

The need for a strong organization of pilots in Lexington was emphasized because of the probability of the State unit coming here. If the unit is established in Lexington the city will probably be located on air routes, from east and west, and north and south, it was said.

Numerous names were suggested for the new club and after careful consideration, the Associated Aviators of Kentucky, was chosen. . .

A committee to draw up the constitution and by-laws of the club was chosen and is composed of Messrs. Murphy, Davis and Fleck. . .

The next business meeting has been called for Monday, August 15 in the offices of the Lexington Aviation Company on North Upper Street.⁸⁵

The 1920 Census list Bee as living in Lexington Ward 3, Fayette County, Kentucky. He listed his occupation as Captain, Aviator.⁸⁶

By April 1924, the Osborne family was living at Grahn, in Carter County, Kentucky, as the local agent for the C & O Railroad.

07 October 1928:

Man Who Began Military Career in Lexington Was First Aviator to Test American Plane in France

Obtaining his first military experience in a Lexington unit of the Kentucky National Guard in 1915, Bee R. Osborne, who saw five years' service as an aviator and served in this capacity throughout America's participation in the World War, has retired to the quiet life of agent and operator for the Chesapeake and Ohio railroad at Grahn, Ky.⁸⁷

When Mr. Osborne was discharged for the army he bore the rank of captain. He served as chief test pilot for American planes arriving in France and piloted the first Liberty plane to reach that country. He saw duty in many sections and made numerous flights to the front line.

During his five years' active service as an aviator he did not have an accident.

The story of his career is told in the October issue of the Chesapeake and Ohio and Hocking Valley Employees Magazine and is presented herewith:

Born at Midway, Ky., in November, 1886. Mr. Osborne later moved with his family to Lexington, Ky., where he got his first job as night chief operator with the Western Union Telegraph Company. In November, 1915, he joined Company A, Signal Corps, and was chosen as Kentucky's representative to receive a course in flying instruction at Newport News, Va., at a school conducted by Captain Baldwin, noted balloonist.⁸⁸ He was commissioned second lieutenant, Company M, Third Regiment, and reported for instructions in January 1916. He completed the course in flying in May, 1916, and returned to the Kentucky National Guard in Lexington. In a short while he was called out and sent to Mineola, Long Island, for advanced training.

In December, 1916, with 12 other airplanes, he piloted a machine from Mineola to Philadelphia, one of the longest flights ever made at that time.⁸⁹ The flight was made to test the flying ability of the pilots and to determine the necessary clothing for cold weather long distance flying.

Commissioned Lieutenant

Two months later, in February, 1917, Mr. Osborne was commissioned a first lieutenant, Reserve Corps, aviation section, Signal Corps, and detailed for duty at San Antonio, Texas. In April he was ordered to Columbus, N. M. where he joined the First Aero Squadron, U. S. Army. In June he received orders to sail for France and he embarked on the SS Lapland on July 13 at New York. On arrival in Paris he was detailed as radio officer under Colonel Gorrell⁹⁰ and made up the program and ordered all radio equipment used by the Aviation Squadron of the American Army. He later was made commanding officer of Airdrome at Villacoublay, France. He was chief test and acceptance pilot for the American government under Col. Dunwoody,⁹¹ and was commissioned captain in May, 1918.

Tested First Plane

While at Villacoublay, Capt. Osborne was sent to Romorantin, about 200 miles east of Paris, to test the first American plane to arrive in France. This, the Liberty plane,⁹² was flown on May 18, 1918, and the Paris papers had interesting accounts of the flight.

In June, 1918, Capt. Osborne was transferred as commanding officer of aviation field at Romorantin, where the Liberty planes were received from the United States, uncrated and set-up, and radios and machine guns installed. They

then were tested by the air pilots and ferried to Colombes La Belles air supply depot.⁹³ In August, Capt. Osborne took over the command of the 1106th Aero Replacement Squadron at Romorantin, but still acted as chief test pilot and assisted in testing the planes to be used at the front. During this period he made many flights to the front, ferrying planes.

After the armistice was signed, Capt. Osborne was detailed to salvage and ship back to the United States all planes that were serviceable. He remained at Romorantin in charge of this work until September 1919, when he was ordered to return to the United States with his Company. They sailed Sept. 9, 1919.

During five years of flying he did not have a single accident.

In November, 1920, Capt. Osborne entered the service of the Chesapeake and Ohio as extra agent-operator under R. W. Freeman, chief train dispatcher, Ashland, Ky. He remained in this position until April, 1924, when he was assigned position of agent and operator at Grahn, Ky., where he now is stationed.

In August, 1927, he was commissioned colonel on the staff of Gov. William J. Fields, of Kentucky.⁹⁴

B. R. Osborne, of Grahn, Ky., was appointed a Kentucky Admiral of the Tiger River, by Governor Flem D. Sampson, on 20 February 1929.⁹⁵

The 1930 Census lists Bee Osborne and family living at Pleasant Valley in Carter County, Kentucky. He lists his occupation as a Railroad Telegraph Operator, and that he was a veteran of the World War.⁹⁶

During the 1930's, the C & O Railroad moved Osborne to Winchester, Kentucky, where his family took up residency at 373 Boone Avenue. While living in Winchester, Osborne became a member of the Daniel Boone Post No. 19, American Legion.

17 November 1939:

Winchester Man Who Flew First American Plane in France Praises Neutrality Act

"I hope that the day never will come when some other youngster will have to be the first Yankee flyer to go aloft over foreign soil in another war in 'defense' of this country."

That is the view of the man who should know if anyone does—the first U. S. Army pilot to fly an American-made plane in France during the World War.

Now 53 and graying, B. R. Osborne, Winchester railroad telegrapher, saw war and wants no more of it for this country except in the event that our shores are attacked by an enemy.

He thinks there is very little chance of us getting into the present European conflict, having this optimistic outlook even when others already are calling the new war "World War II."

Not prone to air his opinions, Mr. Osborne's terse comments upon the war that came after the war that was to end wars were made in the first interview he has granted for newspaper publication.

Has Shunned Publicity



For 21 years, Mr. Osborne has kept silent, refraining from permitting anyone to put in a newspaper an account of his overseas experiences, being content to go his own way in his quiet life as a railroad telegraph operator and ticket agent.

Even after persuasion, Mr. Osborne discussed, not himself and the World War, but today and the new European struggle. To one of his friends, one had to turn to get data about Mr. Osborne.

One of them had copied from "The Propeller," official organ of the American Expeditionary Forces in France, an article relating details of the first flight of one of Uncle Sam's planes in Europe during the World War.

This friend, enthusiastic about Mr. Osborne's war experiences, also had at his fingertips the story of the telegrapher's whole war career.

Lauds Neutrality Act.

So, while Mr. Osborne hailed the recently enacted Neutrality act as "the greatest thing ever done" to keep us out of war and praised President Roosevelt for acting to keep United States ships out of belligerent waters, one also kept an ear tuned to what Mr. Osborne's friend had to say about the one-time flyer.

Somehow, the reticence of Mr. Osborne about himself added to his stature, made his opinions about what this country's role should be as a real neutral during the war of our day something worth listening to, something worth remembering.

The fact that Mr. Osborne was not conscious of preaching a fine doctrine, merely expressing himself as he would to a close friend over a cup of coffee, without dogmatism, also heightened one's interest in what he had done in the World War.

It was on May 18, 1918, that Mr. Osborne, then Captain Osborne of the Air Corps, flew the first U. S. battle plane. The account in "The Propeller" did not say it was May 18, 1918, but stated that the plane was christened and then successfully flown by Captain Osborne amid "auspicious surroundings on a recent date."

Censor Was at Work

This "recent date" no doubt was the brain child of a censor who did not want the Germans to know when the first American plane was tested in France.

"The event marks the beginning of a distinct change from a half-passive, hap-hazard air service to an active, comprehensive program of operations from which important results are expected," stated the article.

It went on to describe a sultry afternoon setting for the flight when the elements "seemed to hold their forces in check to allow a perfect test."

After Mrs. Florence H. Kendall, an American woman, went to the plane and pronounced the words, "I name thee, The Lady Florence," Captain Osborne and his observer, as Captain Miller, climbed into their seats in the DH-4 plane, a DeHaviland which could be used as a bomber or reconnaissance ship.

With 800 spectators cheering lustily, the plane roared into the sky. When it returned and was landed perfectly, the crowd surrounded the ship and showered the pilot with congratulations upon a successful test of the plane.

Spent 26 Months Overseas

This testing of the first U. S. plane in France undoubtedly was the highlight of Captain Osborne's war experiences, which extended over 26 months overseas.

But throughout that time he acted as chief test pilot for American planes arriving in France and saw duty in many war sectors.

He made many flights to the front, ferrying planes from his headquarters, ASPC No. 2 (Air Service Production Center No. 2).

During five years of service, in this country and abroad, he did not have a single accident.

A native of Midway, Mr. Osborne later moved with his family to Lexington, where he obtained his first job as night chief operator with the Western Union Telegraph Company.

In November, 1915, he joined Company A, Signal Corps, and later was chosen as Kentucky's representative to receive a course in flying at Newport News, Va. Commissioned a second lieutenant in Company M, Third Regiment, he reported for instructions in January, 1916, and completed the course, in May, 1916. He then returned to the Kentucky National Guard unit at Lexington.

Made Early Training Flight

Shortly afterward he was ordered to Mineola, L. I., for advance training. While there he participated in what at that time was one of the largest mass flights ever made by a group of planes. Accompanied by a squadron of 12 other planes, he piloted his machine from Mineola to Philadelphia, one of the longest flights ever made up to that time. It was made during the cold December of 1916.

Two months later he was commissioned a first lieutenant in the reserve corps of the aviation section of the Signal Corps and saw duty at San Antonio, Texas, and at Columbus, N. M.

In June [1917] he received orders to sail for France and he embarked on the S. S. Lapland on July 16 at New York. After duty at Paris in the radio section of the Air Corps, he later was made commanding officer of the airdrome at Villacoublay, France, becoming chief test and acceptance pilot for the American government and being commissioned a captain in May, 1918.

While at Villacoublay, Captain Osborne was sent to Romorantin, about 200 miles east of Paris, to test the first plane to arrive in France. The place where the first test was made was not revealed in "The Propeller" account but from other records. That war-time journal merely called Romorantin "a camp over here."

Salvaged World War Planes

Later, Captain Osborne was transferred to Romorantin from Villacoublay as commanding officer. After the Armistice was signed, he was detailed to salvage and ship back to the United States all planes that were serviceable. Finally, his work completed, he sailed for home in September, 1919.

In November, 1920, he entered the service of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad Company as an extra agent-operator in the Ashland division. He then was assigned to a position as agent and operator at Grahn, Ky. For the past three and a half years he has been telegraph operator and ticket agent at Winchester. He is married and has one son, B. R. Osborne Jr.

He is a member of the drum and bugle corps of Man O' War Post No. 8, American Legion, here, and the Air Service Veterans' Club. He was commissioned an admiral on the staff of former Gov. Flem Sampson and a colonel on the staff of

former Gov. William J. Fields. He is an ardent fisherman and an amateur camera fan.⁹⁷

The 1940 Census lists Osborne still living in Winchester and still working as a Telegraph Operator for the railroad. He listed his previous address as Weeksbury, Floyd County, Kentucky.⁹⁸

On 07 December 1941, the United States becomes embroiled in a Second World War. In June 1942, Bee R. Osborne, Jr., followed in his father's footsteps and joined the Army, and becomes a Signaller. While on furlough from the Army in late June 1942, young Osborne was fatally injured when he struck his head on a stump while diving in the Kentucky River at Boonesboro. He was 25 at the time of his death.

In November 1943, Osborne and his wife, Cora, moved from Winchester, to 106 North Pin Oak Drive, Lexington. Bee would become a member of the local American Legion, Man O' War Post No. 8.

02 October 1947:



These 17 men were the first reserve officers to receive pilot training from the U. S. Army prior to World War I. Lt. B. R. Osborne, of Lexington, sixth from left, back row, was one of the charmed group. Osborne, now ticket agent for the C. and O. railroad here, was a test pilot in France and flew the first American plane to reach that country during the war. Osborne now lives at 106 Pin Oak avenue. Inset, upper right, is Osborne as he looked 30 years ago when he was flying a "Jenny," one of the U. S.'s first military aircraft.

Lexington's Niche in Air Power Saga Secure in Person of World War I pilot Railroad Agent Here Is Proud Possessor of Record in Flying By Frank Borries

Dayton has the Wright brothers and North Carolina has its Kitty-hawk, but Lexington has edged into the historic niche of the early days of flying with a quiet,

silver-haired little man who in his day scored a couple of “firsts” that give him an undisputed place in the saga of American air power.

Bee R. Osborne, agent for the Chesapeake and Ohio railroad office here, is the man and his “firsts”—either actual or probable—include:

1. One of the first reserve officers to be trained by the U. S. Army as a pilot;
2. One of the earliest—if not the first—test pilots to be used by the American Army in France;
3. One of the group of pilots who flew the first mass formation flight of American airplanes and which set a new distance record for that time.
4. Definitely the first man to fly an American plane in France in World War I.

Osborne ticks off on his fingers now these accomplishments with considerable pleasure, since his records can’t be beaten and can’t be disputed. He doesn’t brag of them—it took considerable persuasion to get permission to write this story because he dislikes personal publicity—but he is proud of his part in aviation’s early days.

How did the last come about?

In May, 1918, Osborne was a test pilot at Villacoublay airdrome at Paris. He was ordered to Romorantin, east of Paris, to test out the first Liberty ship sent to French, which was then being uncrated and assembled.

Osborne took the assignment and on May 18, was in the air—the first American to fly an American plane in France during World War I.

Here is the story of the events leading up to that day which caused the heavy accumulation of yellowed newspaper clippings and faded photographs in Osborne’s war memoir books.

Started In Lexington

In 1916, Osborne was a member of a Lexington National Guard unit. The Aero Club of America at that time started a program for training fledgling pilots by the Army. The program called for only one officer from any state be permitted to receive the training.

Osborne pulled hard for the Kentucky assignment—by his own admission he was “young and eager to do anything new like that”—and finally got the appointment. He reported to Newport News, Va., for his training.

Group Flew Any Thing

He and 18 other officers took the Virginia training and qualified as pilots. He flew the famous “Jenny” and even Standards and plus flying boats (such as the NC-4 which crossed the Atlantic in 1919) and whatever else was handy.

He soloed in 480 minutes flying time, and did it just as many another kiwi has done since. The instructor—Osborne remembers him as a sarcastic and vociferous gentleman—hopped out after a practice landing dual, looked at Osborne and growled:

“Take it around yourself and try to keep from killing yourself.”

Osborne “got a handful of throttle” and took off. A few feet off the ground, he remembers, he realized he was alone and started wondering how to get it down sometime.

“I circled for a long while, then decided to come on in (that’s a feeling every kiwi on his solo hop has) since I had to come down sometime.

“I never made a better landing, before or since,” he reminisced.

Received Commission

After that course, Osborne was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Signal Corps (which controlled the Air Corps at that time) and was promptly sent to Mineola, L. I., for more training. There he took part in the first mass hop that set a distance record.

He and the other pilots set out for Philadelphia to test out winter flying clothes the government was thinking of buying for its pilots.

Osborne went solo and made the trip okay. So did everybody else except a couple of ships that were forced to turn back by motor trouble, or which got lost and had to make forced landings.

Next stop for Osborne was Columbus, N. M., for further training. Here he encountered an Army pilot who later became a famed Air Corps general in this war. His name: Carl (Tooe) Spaatz.

After Columbus, Osborne came back to Lexington, but in a short while—war had been declared—was on his way overseas to become a member of a nucleus corps of American pilots there.

Osborne Made Test Pilot

In France, because he was a tip-top pilot and would be cautious while taking the necessary chances—an integral part of the early pilot’s mental makeup—he was made a test pilot.

And for the remainder of the war, while others crashed around him in their wire and canvas ships, Osborne coolly flew everything the French, British and Italians had to offer the U. S. for equipping its small air force.

Osborne test-hopped Spads, Nieuports, Brequets, Avros, Sopwith “Camels,” S. E. 5’s (a British ship) Handley-Paige bombers, Caproni’s (one of the largest bombers) and numerous pilot aircraft which never reached the production line.

Test hopping in those days was non-habit-forming. The idea was to put the ship through every maneuver possible, and in one piece and see if the plane held up.

Wore No Chutes

The testers wore no chutes and had no special instruments to help them in their work. They simply flew till the wings came off.

The instrument panel of those days, compared to today’s ship was a joke. It had a tachometer, air speed indicator, a compass, temperature gauge and that’s about all. The pilot’s altimeter was worn strapped on the knee.

But Osborne survived it all, the loops, spins, rolls, stalls, Immelman’s (a climb with a half-roll at the top), falling leafs, whip stalls, and what have you.

The only tight spot he remembers particularly was during a test-hop of a DH-4 (the old Liberty two-place ship used for photography and reconnaissance).

At eight thousand feet he pulled up, throttled back and kicked his rudder hard right and held back on the stick to go into a spin. The spin was quickly entered and after a few turns, he decided to come out.

Neutral controls wouldn't stop the spin, Osborne remembers. He over-controlled to the left. The spinning ship righted itself and Osborne breathed a sigh of relief, which was short lived.

Spin Reversed

The old Liberty immediately whipped into a left hand spin and the ground was getting too close. Osborne said he finally got it out after "doing everything I could in that cockpit. When I finally did the right thing, she came out okay."

He remembers the altimeter strapped to his knee read "about 2,000 feet." He had spun down more than 6,000 feet in a few seconds.

The wonder of it is the plane survived.

Highlight of the war was when Osborne—who had asked continuously for combat duty—was told to go to Romorantin and test-hop a Liberty which had been received all crated up. It was the first one in France and Osborne took off for the task without giving a thought.

Celebration Real Surprise

To his surprise there was a big celebration planned incident to the flight. He was the recipient of many a bouquet of flowers and French commendation and subjected to minutes of oratory before he embarrassedly climbed into the ship, picked out a Captain Miller for ballast, and took off on a test hop.

While thousands cheered—literally—the little captain went through the normal routine of testing. He declined to comment if his enthusiastic passenger enjoyed the ride he so brashly had volunteered for, but it's a safe bet the gentleman was looking longingly at the ground after Osborne took a few stalls and steep turns.

During his stay at Villacoublay, which is just outside Paris, Osborne grew to know and like very well a handsome young flier who had made an excellent record with the Lafayette Escadrille and later the American "Hat-in-the-Ring" squadron. His name: Eddie Rickenbacker. Osborne test hopped ships that Rickenbacker used in his squadron.

Has Flier's Reverence

Osborne liked his job and still has the airman's reverence for flight. The little captain thoroughly enjoyed flying the Avros—"land like a feather"—and thought the little Nieuports—"they don't have a throttle, just a gas and air mixture control and an arrangement for cutting out certain cylinders to decrease or increase your speed"—an excellent ship.

The famous SPAD (the letters were from the French) "Societe pour Aviation Development," was an excellent ship but tricky. "Other ships' wings had dihedral (upperward tilt) but the SPAD had cathedral (downward tilt at the ends) and you can imagine what that did on a turn. It sure was a maneuverable ship, though."

Camels Were Tricky

SE-5's and Camels were good fighter ships, but tricky, he said. The American Liberty was dangerous because of the gas tank between the front and rear cockpits.

"The boys used to call them flying coffins," he says. "They sure were, too."

After his memorable first, Osborne finished the war out at Romorantin, doing test hopping. "The Liberty's were really coming in and we had our hands full rigging them and testing them."

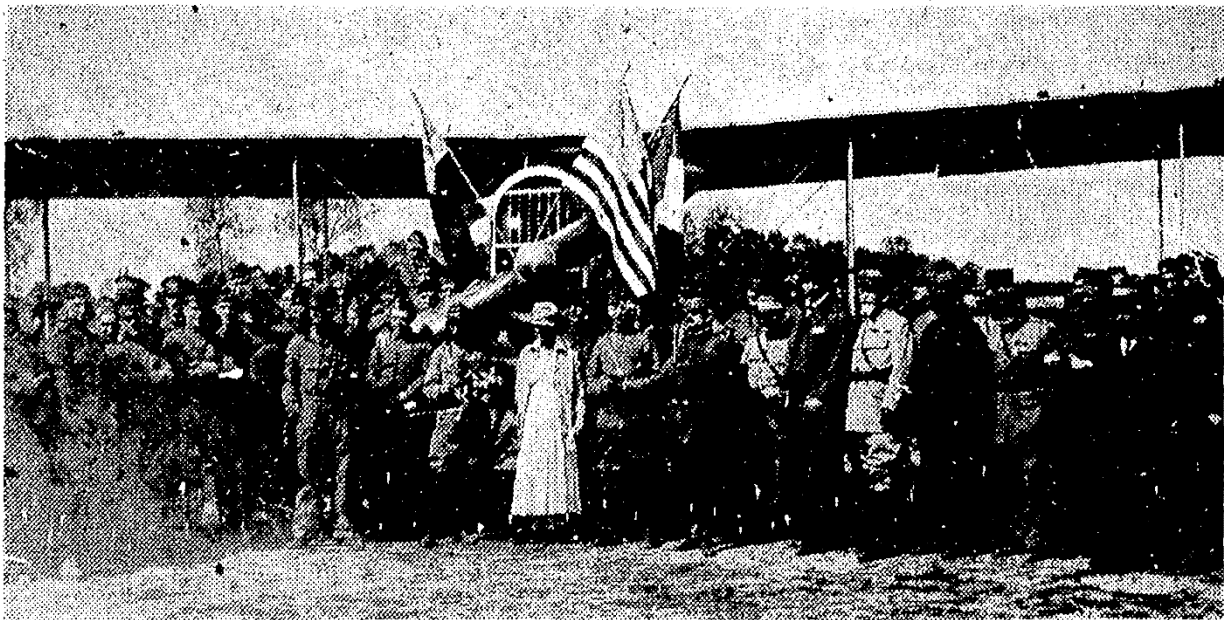
When the war was over, he came back to the states and did a year's tour in Washington, flying whenever he could.

Still loving to fly, Osborne stays out of modern planes for some reason.

"But," he mused, "if I could just get my hands on a good Nieuport or an Avro—darned if I wouldn't fly the thing tomorrow."

That would just be another first for Osborne; first man to fly a Nieuport or Avro over Lexington—even though the ships are a little out of date.⁹⁹

23 April 1950:



Forgotten now is the name of the photographer who made this picture, but the scene is one for history. It shows Bee R. Osborne (holding bouquet of roses) of 106 Pin Oak avenue, just before he took off in the first American Army plane flown in France in World War I. The plane was a DeHavilland reconnaissance-bomber. Beside Osborne is Mrs. Florence H. Kendall, a prominent war-worker of the day, who dedicated the plane, and surrounding them are dozens of high-and low-ranking American, British and French army men. Osborne, then an Army captain, now is local ticket agent for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company.

Aviation's Progress Has Been Amazing Since Bee Osborne Made History In '18

By James F. Rourke

Bee Osborne of Lexington, former Army pilot, once thought he was lucky to have a compass in his plane. One look at the instrument panel of a modern airship is enough to make him head the other way.

Osborne and a handful of fellow fliers once made headlines with a "mass flight" which covered the magnificent distance of 200 miles between Mineola, Long Island, and Philadelphia. But the mass flights of the war and the daily thousands of military and commercial flights today are mere statistics.

That there are such statistics; that a three-day trip around the world is almost a common-place (and may be old stuff by 2000) argue that man's progress with the airplane is one of the most amazing phenomena of the first half of the 20th century.

Osborne Now 63

That Osborne owns photographs to show he was on hand for "the beginning, or just about" of modern aviation in the first quarter of the century brings the phenomena home.

Now a brisk 63, the Lexingtonian made a little of this history himself at 31 by becoming the first U. S. Army pilot to fly an American-made plane in France in World War I.

The plane was a "Liberty," a DH-4, a De Havilland that could be used as a bomber or reconnaissance ship. Its instruments included a tachometer, a gasoline gauge and an oil gauge—this in a day when a pilot carried a plane's altimeter strapped to his leg, when airspeed indicators were a novelty and when a plane was "lucky to have a compass."

The flight was made May 18, 1918, at Romorantin airfield about 200 miles east of Paris. According to the "Propeller," an AEF publication, the surroundings were "auspicious." Osborne was an Army test-pilot with the rank of captain. He didn't see the plane until he was ordered to the field that day to test it.

Osborne admitted he was scared at the thought of the test. The plane was "brand new," the pilots had heard it was on the way to France, but nobody knew what it could do. As shown in Osborne's pictures, it was an out-sized, open-air orange crate by any standard.

Sultry Day for Flight

The day of the flight was "sultry," the Propeller reported, but the "elements seemed to hold their forces in check to allow a perfect test." A host of high-ranking American, British and French military men were there, as was a prominent American war-worker, Mrs. Florence H. Kendall.

Mrs. Kendall christened the plane "Lady Florence," gave Osborne a huge bouquet of roses, then posed with the pilot and the brass for numerous pictures in front of the plane. Osborne recalls he told Mrs. Kendall to "Hold those flowers until I come down. I might need em' then.

He didn't of course. Accompanied by an observer, a Capt. Miller, he took off, flew and landed with "800 spectators cheering lustily," and, according to the Propeller, "the official test proved to be a great success."

Now ticket agent for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company here, Osborne hasn't flown for the last 15 years—privately, commercially or otherwise, he says. A native of Midway, he's married and has a quiet home at 106 Pin Oak Avenue. He went from airplanes to trains in 1920, a little more than four years after he first learned to fly.

The Propeller had this to say about the flight of the first American Army plane in France in World War I:

"The event marks the beginning of a distinct change from a half-passive, haphazard air service to an active, comprehensive program of operations from which important results are expected."

Not Fantastic Any More

Six years later the war-famous but war-weary Jenny (which few airmen today would take off the ground) still was seeing service, in a tough, glamour-shrouded but not brilliantly successful airmail service. And by 1926, all but three of the 17 aircraft firms which had been established in World War I had gone out of business.

A decade later aviation had all but taken a back seat, although kids were trading pictures of “fantastic” drawing-board planes and after a few years, people in the vicinity of Dayton, Ohio, had got accustomed to seeing the B-19 in the skies.

Aviation production, development and research were in high gear after the jolt of Pearl Harbor. The P-38's, P-40's, P-47's and the P-51's were a far cry from the plane Osborne tested—less than a quarter of a century after he tested it. Even Army and Navy cadet training planes were better than the DH-4—but only because of it.

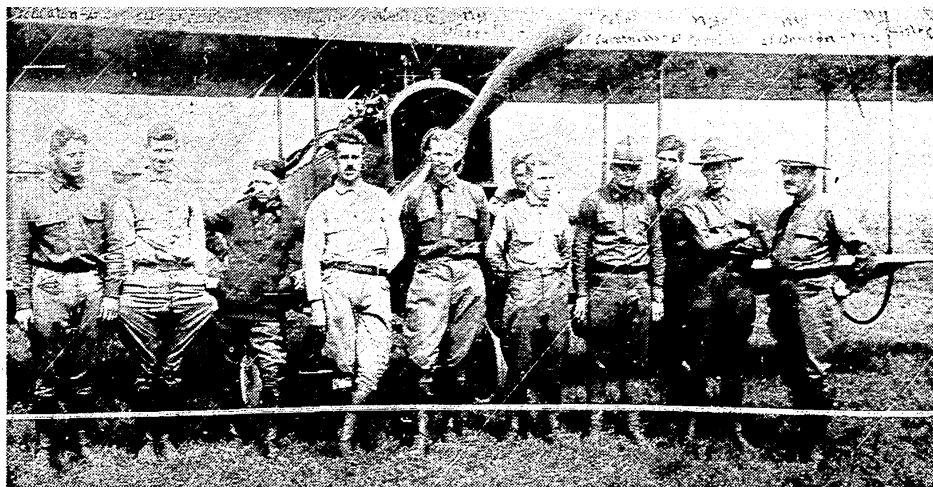
And now some of the planes of World War II seem old-fashioned besides the F-80 Shooting Star jet fighter, which has been clocked at 623 miles an hour; the F-87, powered by four jet engines and having a wing-span of 66 feet, or the experimental jet jobs which have streaked through the sky at supersonic speeds. No authority will talk about flying saucers—but do they seem too fantastic?¹⁰⁰



Tests First Fighter . . . French and American generals and a movie star, Mabel Normand, were on hand to see B. R. Osborne, Lexington, in pilot suit near propeller, flight-test the first American-built plane to reach France in World War I.



11 January 1959:



AMONG THE FIRST—B. R. Osborne, Lexington, who was among the first Army fliers, is shown with a group of air trainees shortly before World War I at Mineola, Long Island. Osborne is third from left. He later took part in a flight from Mineola to Philadelphia that was a record in its day, and served as a test pilot in France during the war.

Lexingtonian is a Member of OX-5 Club

It's a long way, technically, from the "Jenny" biplane to the latest rocket craft speeding through the stratosphere at seven times the speed of sound, but a number of the air pioneers who played a part in giving America wings are still around to see where their efforts have led.

Interest in pioneer aviation was spurred in Kentucky recently when a Kentucky chapter of the OX-5 Club of America was formed.

The OX-5, which powered the famous "Flying Jenny," has been called the Model-T of the aviation industry. Mass-produced during World War I, it was a V-type, water-cooled Curtiss engine which used 90 horsepower to provide 1,400 revolutions per minute.

It was sworn by in some cases, sworn at in others, but it provided the motive power by which most of the World War I aviators got their start, and probably did more to make America aviation-conscious than any other engine.

About 75 Kentuckians are listed as OX-5 Club eligible, by reason of having flown or served as mechanics on the Jennies, which were correctly designated as the Curtiss JN-4D's.

One OX-5 member B. R. Osborne, 106 Pin Oak Drive, was a member of the first class who went to Newport News, Va., in the "preparedness" days of 1915 to learn the new art of flying.

Already a lieutenant in the National Guard, Osborne had no special interest in flying—until a representative of the Aero Club of America came to Lexington.

"He made a talk on the subject and asked whether anyone would volunteer to go for flying instructions," said Osborne, "I didn't have any more sense than to say I would."

Osborne, who later served as a test pilot in France and remained in the Army flying service until 1920, says he never regretted the decision, however, despite the extreme danger of flying in those days.

A picture in his album shows an Army cemetery filled with crosses marking grave of people who “got killed just learning to fly.” But Osborne never received a scratch in years of flying practically every make of “flying coffin” used in those days—the French Spads and Nieuports, British Sopwiths, and other frail craft which tangled with their German counterparts over the Western Front.

France and Britain provided most of the combat planes used by America in World War I, and it was Osborne’s job to give the new planes a try-out before sending them up for front-line duty.

Remembers French Plane

Osborne remembers one plane with special affection—the “sweet-handling” little Nieuport 28, a French plane which, like all other French models except the Spads, had a revolving engine on a fixed crankshaft.

The French and British fighters had speed to burn for those days—up to 125 miles per hour or so. The Jenny trainers made 80 to 90, with 30 miles an hour a good landing speed.

Osborne trained at Newport News from December, 1915, to June 28 the following year. His next station was Mineola, L. I., where he piloted a plane in a record flight for that time—from Mineola to Philadelphia.

Navigation was tough—compasses in planes were non-existent and cross-country maps were crude, but Osborne was only lost once in his flying career.

That was on a flight from Paris to a French airfield in which he was following a railway line. A spur line fooled him, and he followed it until he had to make a forced landing on a golf course which went with a French chateau. . .¹⁰¹

19 June 1960: At a reunion of sixteen members of Company A, Signal Corps, held at the Lexington Blue-Grass Army Depot:



FIRST SIGNAL GUARD COMPANY—Members of the first Signal National Guard Company to be mobilized by federal government in the front row of this picture taken recently at a meeting at the signal depot. In the front row, left to right, are Cpl. Samuel J. Amato; Cpl. William H. Masterson, Sgt. Chester Spurlock, Pvt. Howard Turner, Sgt. Charles B. Elston, Sgt. Robert E. Nelson Sr., 1st Lt. Thomas A. Welsh, Pvt. Andrew E. Hickey, Pvt. Floyd Prather, and 2nd Lt. Bee R. Osborne. Members who joined the company after it was designated B Company, 113th Field Signal Bn. are shown in the back row. They are, left to right, Pfc. Cal Cornish, Pvts. T. Gilmore Fury, Martin J. Concannon, W. H. McKinney, Herbert L. Petit, and W. H. Prewitt.

Many of the original members of the unit were separated and went to other units after arriving at the World War I front in France.

Bee Osborne, then a captain and commander of 1106 Aero Squadron, was a member of the original company that left Lexington.¹⁰² He was the first U. S. Army pilot to fly an American made plane in France.

The flight was made May 18, 1918, at Romorantin Airfield about 200 miles east of Paris. He was ordered to test fly the plane and had never seen it.

Osborne recalls that American, British and French military men were on hand for the test flight. Also present was Mrs. Florence H. Kendall, a prominent war worker. He said Mrs. Kendall gave him a large bouquet prior to his take-off in the plane, later known as the "Liberty."

Osborne said he told Mrs. Kendall to "Hold those flowers until I come down. I might need 'em then."

“The Propellor”, an American Expeditionary Forces publication, said “The event (first flight by Osborne) marks the beginnings of a distinct change from half-passive, haphazard air service, to an active, comprehensive program of operations from which important results are expected.”

Osborne recalls that the only instruments on the plane were a tachometer, gasoline gauge and an oil pressure gauge.

Osborne left the Army and airplanes shortly after the war and is now a retired ticket agent of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway.¹⁰³

On 20 June 1960, Bee filed for the Kentucky World War I Veterans’ Bonus. He received a one-time bonus payment of \$348.00, from the Commonwealth on 02 May 1961.¹⁰⁴

15 February 1962: Interview of B. R. Osborne prior to John Glenn’s flight which occurred on 20 February.

Astronaut’s Kentucky Kin Old-Time Pilot Prays For Glenn

By Frank Borries

While John H. Glenn, Jr., was waiting and ready for orbital flight at Cape Canaveral, Fla., 75-year-old B. R. Osborne stood by with “go” in his heart at Lexington, Ky.

The two, although separated in experiences by some 44 years, are pioneer flying kin. Osborne was among the first of United States Army’s test pilots in World War I.

And Osborne, of 106 Pin Oak Drive, Lexington, “knows” he flew the first American-built fighter plane to reach France in World War I.

“It was a Liberty, shipped knocked down and re-assembled near Villacoublay.”

Wears Pressure Suit

Admiration, amazement, sympathy, fear, and maybe even a bit of envy may be aroused by Glenn’s flight, but Osborne says he is most interested in speeds, temperatures, pressures, and other technical phases.

Whereas Glenn was expected to achieve the speed of 19,000 miles per hour in his whirl around the world, Osborne’s top cruising speed in his up-to-date World War I craft was 135 mph.

Glenn’s Atlas is a tight, enclosed affair, and he wears an intricate pressure suit. Osborne flew in an open cockpit and wore fur-lined overalls, leather helmet, and goggles.

And when he changed altitude “my ears popped like corks.”

Crammed With Gadgets

Glenn’s capsule is crammed with technical instruments. Osborne’s ship had a tachometer (velocity measurer) and an oil-pressure gauge.

The gas gauge was under my seat. I’d have to stand up to look at it. You don’t do that in open-cockpit planes. The altimeter was strapped to my right leg. When we finally got some instruments, they had to be mounted on a temporary board in front of the pilot.”

Glenn's course was to be navigated every inch of the way by radar, radio, and a host of other technical instruments. Osborne remembers that during his training, the ships didn't even have a compass.

"I guess they thought we didn't know how to use them."

Despite the wide disparity between Osborne's and Glenn's vehicles, techniques, and instrumentation, the men are kin in the indefinable way good pilots are related.

Took Six-Month Tour

Osborne was a stocky, grim-faced, hard-nosed little pilot who would fly "anything I could get off the ground." Glenn is the same breed.

"I pray for him. He's got what it takes. He's a real pilot," Osborne said.

In 1915 Osborne was a National Guard enlisted man in a Lexington Signal Corps company. When volunteers were sought to take pilot training, "I stepped out and said I would. I don't know why, but I did."

He took a six-month tour of duty at Newport News, Va. Because there were no funds to pay him, a Louisville doctor named Robbins "sponsored" him, meeting all expenses.

After 480 minutes of Dual instruction, Osborne soloed a JN-4, known then and now as the famous "Jenny" airplane. After a tour of duty on the Mexican border, he went overseas in 1917 with the First Aero Squadron.

"They said I was too old to fly combat—I was 32—so I had to work on a project to light landing fields and use radio in planes. After that, early in 1918, I was assigned to test pilot duty at Villacoublay, near Paris."

Souvenirs Displayed

Osborne displays two souvenirs of this era. One is his Aero Club of America certificate, a bank-book-like folder showing he was a qualified pilot. It is numbered 623. The other is a type-written and signed order from a Capt. John Satterfield of the Army Signal Corps. It directs Osborne to test pilot duty.

"I keep that because I like to show it to people who might question whether I was a test pilot. I guarantee you I was. I wrung out every type plane we used in France."

Would he like to get a crack at a second youth now, and make Glenn's flight?

The old pilot's gray-thatched head camp up and his keen eyes looked straight ahead.

"I sure would, yes, I would indeed," he said softly.¹⁰⁵

22 December 1968: Osborne died at the age of 82 on 22 December 1968. His wife, Cora Cook Osborne preceded him in death by twelve days. They are both buried in the Lexington Cemetery.

Bee R. Osborne

Bee R. Osborne, 82, of 106 North Pin Oak Drive, former ticket agent for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad system, died at the St. Joseph Hospital at 12:01 a.m. yesterday after a brief illness. He retired from the Railway Company in 1951.

A native of Scott County, he was a son of the late James Wesley and Polly Ann Stamper Osborne. Educated in Fayette County Schools, he attended the Wilbur Smith Business College.

He was a member of the Crestwood Christian Church, the Masonic Order, the American Legion, and a veteran of World War I. Mr. Osborne was the first pilot to fly an American plane in France where he served as a test pilot during World War I.

Survivors include a sister, Mrs. Hattie O. Stamper, Charleston, W. Va.; a brother, Eli Osborne, Lexington.

The body was taken to the W. R. Milward Mortuary—Southland where services will be conducted at 10 a.m. Tuesday by the Rev. David N. Blondell. Burial will be in the Lexington Cemetery.

Bearers will be Fred H. Osborne, Peter Bruhn, Jack Baber, Gordon R. Swanson, Maurice Jackson and Ben L. Cowgill.

Friends may call at the mortuary from 3 to 9 p.m. today.¹⁰⁶

Appendix A:

Footage of Osborne's "Liberty" plane flight are located at National Archives Activities of the Air Service in France

Produced by: U. S. Army Signal Corps

Length: 3 reels, 30 minutes.

This film provides an overview of A. E. F. Air Service activities in France during 1918. First flight of the American made DH-4 "Liberty" plane in France.

REEL No. 3

24. TTT: The arrival of the first shipment of Liberty Motors and Planes at the test field.
 25. LS: 15 May 1918: Officers stand beside railroad track as train with first delivery of U.S. made airplanes and motors comes in.
 26. TTT: Officers of the Production Department supervise the unloading of the first Liberty Motors and Planes.
 27. LS: Officers supervise the unloading of the planes.
 28. TTT: American and allied Officers attend the Christening and first official flight of the Liberty Plane.
 29. LS: The first American DH-4 Liberty plane in France ceremony.
 30. TTT: Miss Edith Normant presents Captain Osborne with a bouquet of flowers on behalf of the French Government.
 31. MS: Miss Normant presents a bouquet to Captain Osborne.
 32. MS: Mrs. Florence H. Kendall, of New York City, christens the first Liberty plane; L to R are: Captain Pullinger, H.M.S.; Major Bates, U.S.A. and General de L'Espee of the French Army.
 33. TTT: Tying 'Old Glory' to the strut of the first Liberty Plane.
 34. MS: Officer ties small American flag to the strut of the plane.
 35. TTT: The Liberty Plane in its first official flight.
 36. LS: The Liberty plane taxis for take-off.
 37. LS: DH-4 Liberty plane makes its first take off.
- [LS: Long Shot. TTT: Tell-Tale-Title.]

END OF REEL

Film footage of Captain Bee Osborne's flight at CriticalPast website:

http://www.criticalpast.com/video/65675048444_General-de-LEspee_pulling-DH-4-plane_Major-Robert-J-Bates_presenting-a-bouquet

General de L'Espee and Major Robert J. Bates meet at Army Air Service production center at Romorantin, France.

Location: Romorantin, France.

Date: 1918, May.

Duration: 4 minutes, 42 seconds.

No Sound

Clip: 65675048444

U.S. Army Air Service production center number 2, at Romorantin, France during World War I. A tractor pulls a DH-4 plane along a road to a group of hangars. French and American officers of World War I in front of a DH-4 plane with an American flag draped over its engine. Women carry French and British flag. Edith Normant presents Captain

Osborne with a bouquet of flowers on behalf of the French Government. A ceremony in front of DH-4 with French and American officials. United States Air Service officer ties an American flag to the strut of DH-4 plane. Plane taxis, takes off and in flight over Air service production center no. 2 at Romorantin, Loir-et-Cher, France. Pilot and observer get out of DH-4 plane and people walk up to congratulate them. Officer of the production board of the Air Service center number 2 stands in front of a DH-4 plane. French General de L'Espee and Major Robert J. Bates Commander of Air Service Production Center stand in front ofg DH-4 plane. Lieutenant Colonel WC Allen and Major WH Wardwell shake hands. American officer lined up in front of headquarters of Air Service Production Center no. 2. Coloenl EV Summer, Junior Commander Air Service Production.

Appendix B:

Still photographs of Bee R. Osborne's flight

18 May 1918

Romorantin, France

First American-made DH-4 "Liberty" Plane flight

Incorrectly listed as Capt. V. R. Osborne, in the Signal Corps listings, is actually Captain Bee Rife Osborne. May 1918, test pilot at Villacoublay airdrome at Paris. He was ordered to Romorantin, east of Paris, to test out the first "Liberty ship" sent to French, which was then being uncrated and assembled.

Captain Keeling Gaines Pulliam, Jr. another ex-Kentucky National Guard, Company A Signal Corps member, was present for Osborne's historic flight.

Romorantin-Pruniers Airfield was a huge depot built for the Air Service, United States Army during World War I as an aircraft engineering facility. Known as the Air Service Production Center No. 2. Initially, the main purpose of the Center was the assembly and final testing of airplanes and engines manufactured in the United States. However, the Center also developed into a major supply depot for the Dayton-Wright built DH-4 along with the Liberty Engines. It also was a storage and repair depot for all balloons used by the Air Service.

Building 1-A was the main facility for DH-4 assembly. Aircraft manufactured in the United States were disassembled and crated prior to shipment to East Coast Seaports. There, the crates were loaded onto ships that sailed north to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where they were assembled into convoys for the trans-Atlantic crossing. Upon their arrival in European waters, the ships were unloaded either in England or ports in France. The aircraft crates were loaded on flatbed rail cars and routed to Romorantin. This also included the Liberty L-12 aircraft engines, built by Ford, Cadillac, Lincoln, Packard, and General Motors. Upon arrival, the aircraft fuselage and wing components were re-assembled, along with the pilot cockpit instruments, seat and controls. The engines would be installed along with the propeller, fuel tank and the machine guns; bomb racks and other combat equipment.

1106th Aero Squadron (replacement), American Expeditionary Force (AEF), 1 June 1918 to September 1919. Organized: June 1918, at McCook Field, Ohio. Air Service Replacement Squadron, Air Service Production Center No. 2, stationed at Romorantin Aerodrome, Loir-et-Cher, France. Demobilized: September 1919, Camp Dix, New Jersey.¹⁰⁷

12448-12467, p. 172, Catalogue Official A. E. F. Photographs.

12448 [951138]. First flight of Liberty plane. Gen. de l'Espee, Fifth Region, French Army, and Maj. Robert J. Bates, commander of the Air Service Production Center No. 2. Romorantin, France. May 18. 1918.

12449 [952Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. Left to right: Capt. V. R. Osborne, pilot; Lieut. M. L. Geriowski, Capt. K. G. Pulliam. Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.

12450 [953Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. Representatives of the allied countries and welfare workers at the christening before the flight. Romorantin, France. May 18. 1918.

12451 [955Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. General view of military representatives. Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.

- 12452 [956Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. General view of military representatives. Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.
- 12453 [957Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. The garrison band. Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.
- 12454 [959Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. Arrival of representatives of the Allied countries. Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.
- 12455 [960Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. Tent which housed the plane on the testing field at Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.
- 12456 [961Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. Mrs. Florence H. Kendall, of New York City, christening the motor and plane. Capt. Pullinger. H. M. S., holding flag; Maj. Bates, holding American flag; Gen. de l'Espee, French officer on right. Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.
- 12457 [962Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. Watching the flight. Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.
- 12458 [963Y8]. Same as 12457.
- 12459 [965Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. Group of French and American officers in flight. Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.
- 12460 [966Y8]. Same as 12459.
- 12461 [967Y8]. Same as 12459.
- 12462 [969Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. Officers watching flight. Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.
- 12463 [970Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. Presentation of flowers to Capt. V. R. Osborne, pilot, by Mlle. Edith Normant, in behalf of the French Government. Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.
- 12464 [972Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. Mrs. Florence H. Kendall, of New York City, christening the motor and plane. Capt. Pullinger, H. M. S., holding flag; Maj. Bates, holding American flag; Gen. de l'Espee, French officer, on right. Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.
- 12465 [973Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. Gen. de l'Espee and staff watching the flight. Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.
- 12466 [975Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. Mrs. Florence H. Kendall, of New York City, christening the motor and plane. Capt. Pullinger, H. M. S., holding flag; Maj. Bates, holding American flag; Gen. de l'Espee, French officer, on right. Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.
- 12467 [976Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. Interested spectators. Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.

12512-12517, p. 173, Catalogue Official A. E. F. Photographs.

- 12512 [954Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane.
- 12513 [958Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. Preparing for initial flight. Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.
- 12514 [964Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. Presentation of flowers to Capt. V. R. Osborne, pilot, by Mlle. Edith Normant, in behalf of the French Government. Romorantin, France. May 18, 1918.
- 12515 [968Y8]. Same as 12514.
- 12516 [971Y8]. Same as 12463.

12517 [974Y8]. First flight of Liberty plane. Just about to leave ground. Romorantin, France.
May 18, 1918.

Also Technical Photographs:

C-2694 Liberty mounted Brequet plane with Capt. Osborne. Original number, 34.¹⁰⁸

Additional Air Service Records held at the National Archives:

120.5 RECORDS OF THE TECHNICAL STAFF, GHQ AEF

1917-19

543 lin. ft.

120.5.1 Records of the chief of the Air Service

Textual Records: General correspondence, 1917-19 (110 ft.). "History of the U.S. Army Air Service," compiled by Col. Edgar S. Gorrell, 1917-19 (286 vols.), with indexes. Card files of casualties, 1917-19. Special reports, histories, and other records relating to Air Service offices, installations, and units, 1918-19 (114 ft.). Records of the 1st Air Depot (Columbey-les-Belles), Air Service Production Center No. 2 (Romorantin), Spare Parts Subdivision (Nanterre), Treves Airdrome, and 1st-9th Casual Companies, 1918-19. Records of the 2d, 3d, and 7th Aviation Instruction Centers; and 1st-4th Mechanics Regiments, 1917-19. Records of the 1st-3d Air Parks, 1917-18. Records relating to balloon operations, including correspondence of Balloon Wing Companies D-F, 1918-19.

Microfilm Publications: M990.

Air Service Records:

The United States Army did not begin operating an independent air service until April 1918. At that time the air service consisted of only three squadrons for use in the front lines. By the time of the November 11, 1918, armistice, forty-five American squadrons, consisting of 740 planes, were operating. A total of 7,726 officers and 70,769 men served in the air service. Documentation on personnel serving in the air service is normally found among the rosters included in *Gorrell's History of the American Expeditionary Forces Air Service, 1917-1919*, entry 644, Record Group 120. This history has been microfilmed by NARA on fifty-eight rolls as publication M990 and is available for examination in the Microfilm Research Room at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., or for purchase from the National Archives Trust Fund. Also, among the Records of the Army Air Forces (Record Group 18), entries 767A-767II contain correspondence on various units of the air service during World War I. It is possible to locate a roster, letter, or special order pertaining to an individual among this series. The documents are arranged in numerical order by aero squadron or other organizational unit of the air service. Casualty lists for air service personnel are found in entry 569, Record Group 120.

Appendix C: Poem and song, “The Song of the Liberty Plane.”

Song of the Liberty Plane.

The Liberty battle plane over the sea
Is hunting the Boche in the air,
Where the sun cannot shine for the gray rolling smoke
Or the moon for the red, leaping glare.
She carries the hopes of the world on her wings
And she speeds in the wake of her prey,
For the flag has caressed her, and Freedom has blessed her,
And Glory has pointed the way.

The Liberty flyer is roaring aloft
To victory up in the sky.
She is teaching the Hun with her little old gun
That her motto is conquer or die.
She is singing a song as she whizzes along
With a brave U. S. soldier to man her,
For the planes as they sail in the teeth of the gale
Are humming “The Star-Spangled Banner.”
—Minna Irving, in *New York Herald*.¹⁰⁹

© 1918 JUN - 5 1918

March Song-

The Song
of
The Liberty Plane
Poem by

Miss Minna Irving -
Performer of the Liberty Plane Song - Sunday March 17th 1918
Dedicated to
The Jazz Club of America
Music by

George Sweet-

11646
Carl Fischer, New York.
No. 10-12 lines.

Marchial

stacc.

stacc.

stacc.

first march time.

77

The Liberty Bells ring in the

95

95

Sea, hunting the Boche in the air - Where the

95

Sun can-not shine for the gray vol-ling smoke, or the Moon for the red clapping

glare - - She car-ries the hopes of the world on her wings, As she
as in singing thought
accents
etc.
etc.
pp
marcato
 speeds in the wake of her prey - - - For the flag has car-ried her, and
 Free-dom has bress'd her, And Glo-ry has point-ed the way - - - This
Stacc.
Stacc.
Stacc.
 hum-min! She's hum-min! She's hum-min! The dear song of the Star-Spangled



Carl Fischer, New York.
 No. 10-12 lines.

Ban- - - - - nce, She is singing that song as she whizzes a-long, with a

marcato -
brave U.S. Sol-dier to man - - - - - *rec.*

The Sub-ber-ly fire is roaring a -

lost, --- So vic-tor-y up in the sky --- She is

half spoken,

teach-ing the Hun with her lit-tle old gun! That her mot-to is con-quer or

die - - She is sing-ing a song as she whir-les a-long, With a

brave U.S. Sol-dier to man her, For the planes as they sail in the



Carl Fischer, New York.
No. 10-12 Lines.

Teeth of the gale, Are humming the "Star Spangled Ban -- -- --" *She's*

Refrain
Hum-min! She's hum-min! She's hum-min! The dear song of the Star Spang-led

Ban -- -- -- me, She is singing that song, As she whizzes a-long! With a

brave U. S. sol-dier, to man -- -- -- her -- --

George Sweet's New March Song

The "Song of the Liberty Plane," poem by Minna Irving and published in the New York Herald, issue of March 17, 1918, was given a musical setting some weeks since by George Sweet, when it received its public baptism on Monday, September 2, at the Brookside Theatre, on Bedford State Road near Mt. Kisco, in connection with a patriotic playlet [sic] entitled "**The Dream of Wings**," produced by Cora Remington, of the Metropolitan Opera House. From reports of Miss Remington, "The Song of the Liberty Plane" was greeted with phenomenal success, as the following letter to Mr. Sweet will testify:

My Dear Mr. Sweet:

Accompanying my note of appreciation is a copy of the play which was given at Mt. Kisco yesterday. You will see how more than appropriate your splendid song is to the spirit of the text, but it was enjoyed by actors, audience and singers. When "The Dream of Wings" is given in New York I shall hope for your presence in the audience, for your song is to be a feature of every performance. The aviation officers who helped in the performance said it was a "corker" and want me to give it in Mineola. I shall sing it everywhere that I sing during the coming season, for I consider it the best song of the war. With cordial appreciation, I am,

Very truly yours,

(signed)

Cora Remington.

To convey, also, some idea of the success of this song, Mr. Muratore, the celebrated tenor of the Chicago Opera Association, took a manuscript copy with him to sing for the soldiers in France. Alice Nielsen will sing it during her tour, beginning this month. The song was accepted by the director of the New York Police Glee Club, S. L. Safford, organist of St. George's Episcopal Church, and it will be produced in connection with the next Liberty Loan. Mr. Sweet is busy finishing another march song, the poem being by the same talented writer, Miss Irving. Those who have heard it say it is very much more effective than the first. The title is "Over the Top to Glory."¹¹⁰

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ENDNOTES:

- ¹ *Lexington Herald*, 26 August 1915, p. 4.
- ² *Lexington Leader*, 9 March 1916, p. 1. Also see, *The Courier-Journal*, 10 March 1916, p. 3.
- ³ Coker, *History Army Signal Corps*, p. 4.
- ⁴ University of Kentucky.
- ⁵ *The Lexington Herald*, 23 March 1916, p. 5.
- ⁶ *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War. Zone of the Interior: Organization and Activities of the War Department*, vol. III, pt. I, CMH Pub. 23-2, pp. 92-93.
- ⁷ *Aviation and Aeronautical Engineering*, v. I, no. VI, 15 October 1916, p. 180.
- ⁸ *Aviation and Aeronautical Engineering*, v. I, no. I, 01 August 1916, p. 26.
- ⁹ *The United States Army Air Arm*, p. 130.
- ¹⁰ *The United States Army Air Arm*, p. 155.
- ¹¹ *The United States Army Air Arm*, p. 161. WDGO No. 55, 16 October 1916.
- ¹² *The United States Army Air Arm*, p. 162. WDGO No. 55, 16 October 1916.
- ¹³ J. W. Osborne (1853-1924); Poly Ann Stamper Osborne (1859-1926). Siblings were: Hattie O. Stamper (1884-1973); Bee; Clarence S. Osborne (1888-1939); and Eli Osborne (1893-1974).
- ¹⁴ Wilbur Smith served as The Adjutant General of Kentucky from September 1898 to November 1900.
- ¹⁵ *The Clay City Times*, 01 January 1903, p. 3.
- ¹⁶ Unable to locate any additional information on Rosa and what happened to their marriage.
- ¹⁷ *The Delta Democrat-Times*, Greenville, Mississippi, 19 July 1911, p. 1.
- ¹⁸ Service records of Clarence and Eli Osborne, Kentucky Military Records and Research Branch (MRRB), Frankfort, KY.
- ¹⁹ *Lexington Leader*, 11 September 1914, p. 8. Also, *The Courier-Journal*, 13 September 1914, p. 10.
- ²⁰ *Lexington Leader*, 01 October 1915, p. 1.
- ²¹ *The Lexington Herald*, 6 February 1916, p. 6.
- ²² *The Lexington Herald*, dated 9 April 1916, sec. 2, p. 3, indicates that C Company won the match.
- ²³ University of Kentucky.
- ²⁴ *The Lexington Herald*, 23 March 1916, p. 5.
- ²⁵ Keeling Gaines Pulliam, Jr.
- ²⁶ Bee Rife Osborne.
- ²⁷ Initially, Army Aviation fell under command and control of the Signal Corps.
- ²⁸ *The Courier-Journal*, 24 March 1916, p. 3.
- ²⁹ *The Courier-Journal*, 24 March 1916, p. 5.
- ³⁰ *The Courier-Journal*, 01 April 1916, p. 3.
- ³¹ *Flying*, April, 1916, p. 104.
- ³² *The Lexington Herald*, 16 April 1916, p. 6.
- ³³ *Aerial Age*, 17 April 1916, p. 148.
- ³⁴ *Flying*, May 1916, p. 155.
- ³⁵ *The Lexington Herald*, 14 June 1916, p. 10.
- ³⁶ *The Lexington Herald*, 24 June 1916, p. 6.
- ³⁷ *The Courier-Journal*, 24 June 1916, p. 4.
- ³⁸ *The Courier-Journal*, 27 June 1916, p. 2.
- ³⁹ FAI founded in 1905 was the international governing body for aeronautics. France, Britain, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United States belong to the organization.
- ⁴⁰ *Lexington Leader*, 16 July 1916, p. 7.
- ⁴¹ *The Owensboro Messenger*, 25 July 1916, p. 10.
- ⁴² U.S. Army Air Arm, p.177.
- ⁴³ U.S. Army Air Arm, p.178
- ⁴⁴ U.S. Army Air Arm, p.178.
- ⁴⁵ U.S. Army Air Arm, p. 247.
- ⁴⁶ U.S. Army Air Arm, p. 253. Unauthenticated List of Students and Instructors Undergoing Training at Mineola, February 1917.
- ⁴⁷ James DeWeese would go on to serve as the 27th Adjutant General of Kentucky, 1919-1920.
- ⁴⁸ *The Courier-Journal*, 09 October 1916, p. 3.

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- ⁴⁹ *The Courier-Journal*, 20 December 1916, p. 3.
- ⁵⁰ This was a New York National Guard Company.
- ⁵¹ *The New York Times*, 30 December 1916, p. 10.
- ⁵² *The New York Times*, 31 December 1916, p. 8.
- ⁵³ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 31 December 1916, p. 1.
- ⁵⁴ *New York Herald*, 31 December 1916, p. 6.
- ⁵⁵ Meaning to glide in.
- ⁵⁶ *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, 01 January 1917, p. 12.
- ⁵⁷ *Flying*, December 1916, p. 466.
- ⁵⁸ U.S. Army Air Arm, p.192.
- ⁵⁹ Army and Navy Changes of the Day, *Washington Post* 14 January 1917. Also *El Paso Times*, 21 March 1917, p. 4.
- ⁵⁹ Paul Guthrie “Keeling Gaines Pulliam, Jr. – Perpetrator of a Hoax or a Hero?”
<http://www.westernfront.co.uk/thegreatwar/articles/individuals/keelinggainespulliam.htm>
- ⁶⁰ Obituary *Los Angeles Times* 16 November 1974.
- ⁶¹ Lexington newspaper clipping undated - headline “Many of Lexington Signal Company Officers And Men Attained Distinction”.
- ⁶² *The Courier-Journal* 23 March 1917 Page 2 Col 2
- ⁶⁰ *The Lexington Herald*, 15 March 1917, p. 4.
- ⁶¹ *Lexington Leader*, 21 March 1917, p. 8.
- ⁶² *The Lexington Herald*, 21 March 1917, p. 8.
- ⁶³ Maurer, *The U. S. Air Service in World War I*, vol. 1. “The Final Report and a Tactical History.
- ⁶⁴ *Organization of Military Aeronautics*, pp. 26-27.
- ⁶⁵ *Aviation and Aeronautical Engineering*, v. II, no. IX, 1 June 1917, p. 406.
- ⁶⁶ *Aerial Age*, vol. V, 23 July 1917 p. 630.
- ⁶⁷ Gorrell’s History, ch.22, p. 46.
- ⁶⁸ Passenger list, S. S. Lapland, 13 August 1917.
- ⁶⁹ *The Courier-Journal*, 19 August 1917, p. 22.
- ⁷⁰ Gorrell’s History, p. 238.
- ⁷¹ Maurer, vol. 1, p. 117.
- ⁷² Gorrell’s History, ch. 13, pp. 235-248.
- ⁷³ Gorrell’s History, Ch. 11, p. 88.
- ⁷⁴ Gorrell’s History, Ch. 11, p. 91.
- ⁷⁵ *Lexington Leader*, 10 June 1918, p. 10.
- ⁷⁶ *The Daily Republican*, 27 July 1918, p. 2.
- ⁷⁷ *The Houston Post*, 22 September 1918, p. 29.
- ⁷⁸ Gervais Raoul Victor Lufbery was a French and American fighter pilot and flying ace in WWI. Killed in action, 19 May 1918, near Maron, France.
- ⁷⁹ This information is incorrect, May 1918 dates are correct.
- ⁸⁰ Brequet – 14 was a French biplane bomber and reconnaissance aircraft designed by aviation pioneer and aeronautical engineer Louis Brequet
- ⁸¹ *The Washington Post*, 08 February 1919, pp. 1, 5.
- ⁸² Passenger list, S. S. *Matioka*.
- ⁸³ *Lexington Leader*, 08 September 1919, p. 7.
- ⁸⁴ Maurer, *Aviation in the U.S. Army*, pp. 5-6.
- ⁸⁵ *Lexington Herald*, 03 August 1921, p. 1.
- ⁸⁶ U. S. Census, 1920, Kentucky Lexington Ward 3.
- ⁸⁷ Grahns is an unincorporated community located in Carter County, Kentucky. It lies along Route 182, east of Olive Hill and southwest of Grayson.
- ⁸⁸ Captain Thomas Scott Baldwin, 1854-1923.
- ⁸⁹ Distance between these two cities is approximately 126 miles.
- ⁹⁰ Colonel Edgar Staley “Nap” Gorrell, 1891-1945.
- ⁹¹ Colonel Halsey Dunwoody, 1881-1952.
- ⁹² The United States possessed no combat-worthy aircraft upon entry into World War I in 1917. Several European aircraft were considered. The British DH-4 was selected because of its comparatively simple construction and its apparent adaptability to mass production. It was also well-suited to the new American 400-horsepower Liberty V-12

engine. American-built DH-4s were dubbed the "Liberty Plane." By war's end, 13 Army Air Service squadrons, five of them bomber squadrons, were equipped with them. In addition, four combined Navy-Marine squadrons were flying DH-4s along the Belgian coast. Of the 4,346 DH-4s built in the United States, 1,213 were delivered to France, but of those only 696 reached the Zone of Advance. In the postwar period, the DH-4 was the principal aircraft used by the U.S. Government when air mail service began in 1918. The plane was a two-seat, single-engine World War I biplane observation and bomber aircraft; 400-horsepower Liberty V-12 water-cooled engine. American-built version of a British design.

⁹³ Colombey-les-Belles Aerodrome located in the Meurthe-et-Moselle department in north-eastern France.

⁹⁴ *Lexington Leader*, 7 October 1928, p. 1.

⁹⁵ *Lexington Leader*, 20 February 1929, p. 1.

⁹⁶ U. S. Census, 1930, Kentucky Carter County.

⁹⁷ *Lexington Herald*, 17 November 1939, p. 19.

⁹⁸ U. S. Census, 1940, Kentucky Winchester Clark County. Weeksbury also known as Weeksburg is located in Floyd County, Kentucky.

⁹⁹ *Lexington Leader*, 2 October 1947, p. 15.

¹⁰⁰ *Sunday Herald-Leader*, 23 April 1950, p. 50.

¹⁰¹ *Lexington Herald*, 01 November 1959, p. 53.

¹⁰² 1106th Aero Squadron, American Expeditionary Force (AEF), 1 June 1918 to September 1919. Organized in France, Air Service Replacement Squadron, Air Service Production Center No. 2, stationed at Romorantin Aerodrome, Loir-et-Cher, France.

¹⁰³ *Lexington Herald*, 19 June 1960, p. 60.

¹⁰⁴ Osborne veteran bonus record 49465, MRRB, Frankfort, KY.

¹⁰⁵ *The Courier-Journal*, 15 February 1962, p. 15.

¹⁰⁶ *Lexington Herald*, 23 December 1968, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ CMH Pub. 25-3, p. 1078.

¹⁰⁸ Gorrell's History, ch. 24, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ *The Daily Republican*, 27 July 1918, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ *Musical Courier*, New York, 12 September 1918, p. 41.