OX5 AVIATION PIONEERS
TEXAS WING NEWSLETTER
June 2013 No. 57
George Vose, Editor/Secretary
PO Box 908, Alpine, Texas 79831

Message from the Editor/Secretary

Wing President, Mike Lawrence, has done a great job in arranging our annual OX5 meeting and elections in Wichita Falls on June 28-29. We will meet at the Day's Inn and Suites, 4500 Kell Blvd -- Hwy 277/82 which runs east-west through the city. The special OX5 hotel rate will be $72/night plus tax. (This is far better than the $200+ current rates in the Permian Basin). Call Days Inn 940-691-4200 before the cut-off date of June 19, and mention OX5 to receive our special rate. Choice of King Size or Double Queen, and we will have a hospitality room. Wichita Falls is air served by American AL/American Eagle This will be an interesting and fun meeting. **See you there!**

This issue's "Mystery Airplane"

A bit of personal interest in this one, because your newsletter editor soloed in this model. (A long time ago, and soon after the OX5 Waco 10s had been pushed into the backs of hangars). Pick the model.

A. Piper J-3 "Cub" **B. Interstate "Cadet"**
C. Aeronca "Defender" **D. Taylorcraft "Tandem"**

(Answer and information on page 3)

Message from Texas Wing President, Michael Lawrence

Dear Texas Wing Members:

The following is my swan song -- my time as your fearless leader is almost over. I am reasonably proud that I have managed to act as your President for an entire year without committing any really egregious mistakes. Well, I always said I would rather be lucky than good.

Unfortunately, luck did not save me from my well intentioned but misguided attempt to schedule our annual Texas Wing meeting in Midland/Odessa. When I tried to block rooms for the meeting, I was shocked to learn that because of the renewed drilling interest in the Permian Basin, room rates have skyrocketed to the point where a meeting such as ours is just not feasible.

After licking my wounds and doing some further research, I am scheduling the meeting in Wichita Falls on June 28th and 29th which is Friday and Saturday. We will depart on Sunday Morning. There is a small airport on the Jacksboro highway. Kickapoo Airport, with which you might be familiar. During World War I it was named "Call Field", and was used for primary flight training. They have a small exhibit which is open each Saturday from 10:00 AM until noon featuring an original flyable Curtiss Jenny which was purchased by Wichita Falls for the exhibit. I plan to take those in the group who are interested there prior to our annual meeting on Saturday. Anyway, I hope all of you will make an effort to attend. **(Message continued, next page)**

President's message continued:

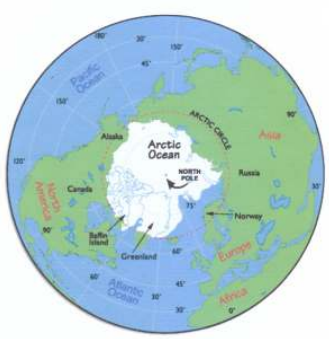
We will have a Debriefing Room where members can meet and swap stories, have a libation or two and enjoy light snacks and chips. Information regarding the meeting will be part of the newsletter with this message. The meeting will be held at the Days Inn and Suites, 4500 Kell Blvd, Wichita Falls, TX. The phone number is 940-691-4200. Breakfast is complimentary.

The Texas Wing is in great shape, thanks to the oversight and guidance of your Board of Governors. We have ampler cash reserves and no debt other than the small expense of producing and sending the newsletter.

It has been my pleasure and honor to act as your President this past year. Thanks for your support and confidence.

Adios, Mike Lawrence

Texas Wing member once ordered to search for land near the North Pole



Very little was known about the north polar region sixty years ago. But polar exploration soon began. After World War II, Texas Wing member Charles M. Opeil was directed by Washington to fly B-29s all over the Arctic Ocean in the search for any unreported land masses.

It is now general knowledge that the ice cap is melting. It is possible that fifty years from now the North Pole will not be covered with ice, but will be under a 13,000 foot-deep ocean. At the present time, only a few adventurous people have stood at the North Pole. But now it is possible to travel there as a tourist. For the price of several thousand Norwegian Kronas (or lots of United States dollars), it is now possible to go there and even sleep overnight at the North Pole. One can fly to Oslo, Norway, then on to the Norwegian town of Longyearbyen on Spitsbergen Island. From there, after a few days while waiting for suitable weather, (and undergoing instructions and the issuance of suitable clothing and equipment), one flies to the Russian Borneo Research Station at 89 degrees north latitude. And finally, a 20-40 minute flight by helicopter to the North Pole. Here you will take pictures, sip champagne, "dine", and curl into a massive sleeping bag in an unheated tent to spend a sunlit night at the North Pole.

Sixty years ago there were none of these amenities. The Polar region hardly had been mapped. At the 2001 OX5 Awards Banquet in Scottsdale, Arizona, your newsletter editor had the pleasure of sitting with retired Air Force Colonel Charles ("Chuck") Opiel. When he mentioned briefly his Polar air searches – we sniffed a story for the Texas Wing Newsletter.

Young Opiel with American Eagle

First, a bit about Charles "Chuck" Opiel: ***Chuck started flying in 1935. He first soloed a Taylor J-2 Cub at a Bedford, Ohio, hay field, followed by an OX5 American Eagle. He enrolled in the Fenn College of Engineering in Cleveland, but was soon out of flying money. One of his professors suggested that he try for the Army Air Corps, so he enlisted in 1938, beginning a 25-year career in military aviation. His flight training began at Randolph Field, then known as "The West point of the Air". His first trainer was the PT-3, then he moved to the Stearman PT-9, and finally to the Boeing pursuit PT-26 at Kelly Field. After being stationed at Hawaii's Wheeler Field and Hickham Field, he returned to mainland Santa Anna, California to organize the first twin engine flight school. World War II began and the Army Air Force introduced the B-17. Chuck trained B-17 pilots, then B-29 pilots.***

Here is Charles Opiel's story just as he wrote it and mailed it to us:

"Our first flight over the north pole was from the Fairbanks Ladd Field and return. We had a top secret mission. One was to fly over the Arctic to see if there was any land up that way. At first we thought we found some land, only to find it missing on subsequent flights. So we started to search again and finally found a large – **super large** --chunk of ice. Later on the Air Force placed men on it. As I remember, they named it 'T-1' ".

"Let me say, there is no flat place in the Arctic Ocean. As the seasons change the ice melts, and it becomes a field of jagged hunks. Navigation in the Arctic in those days was something else. When you're at the pole, all directions from it are south. The magnetic compass just keeps rotating. We used the gyro attached to the autopilot, but of course we needed to find its rate of precession before going on the flight. Position reporting was done by talking with other aircraft which, in turn, passed it on to Fairbanks. Sun spots played heck with the transmissions".

"We had to cover the Arctic by both radar and photography to satisfy the Chief-of-Staff in Washington. Clouds near the surface covered the ice – but they were always moving around. Fortunately we never had an airplane go down while flying in the Arctic. I certainly respect the people who reached the North Pole by dog sled. I wonder if they really reached the North Pole. (All of our time in the Arctic was flown between 1947 and 1949)."

Sadly, Texas Wing member Charles B. "Chuck" Opiel flew west in 2006.

"Chuck" Opiel spent later years as the Veteran's Service Officer in Gaines County, Texas.

(Note his OX5 bolo tie).

The Mystery Plane, Page 1.

Texas Wing Editor George Vose soloed in one of these airplanes on August 10, 1942. As designed by James Weagle and first constructed at Lunken Field, Cincinnati, the **AERONCA "DEFENDER"** was a high wing cabin monoplane with seating arranged for two in tandem. The Aeronca "Tandem" was designed in 1940, specifically for the Civil Pilot Training Program (CPT) when the side-by-side Aeronca Chief was not considered suitable for pilot training. The design incorporated suggestions by flight instructors. For example: the rear seat was five inches higher than the front seat for better cockpit and outside visibility. When the Army first ordered this airplane as the L-3, the model name was changed patriotically from Aeronca "Tandem" to Aeronca "Defender".

Specifications and performance data were practically the same when installed with a Lycoming (65-TL), a Continental (65 TC) or a Franklin (65-TF). Empty weight 727 lbs, gross weight 1150, max speed 94 mph, cruise 80 at 75% power, stall speed 35. Fuselage construction was welded chrome-moly tubing. fabric covered, stick-type control. Wing construction was solid spruce spars with dural metal truss-type wing ribs. Price at factory $1,373 first, and later $1650.

Photo: Daniel J. Simonsen. Information: J. P. Juptner, U. S. Civil Aircraft Series Vol 6, McGraw-Hill Inc, NY, 1971.

Airplane engines prior to the OX5

***Editor Note**: OX5 member John McCrory of Marfa has been researching early airplane engines that eventually led to the Glenn Curtiss OX5. The following is Part IV of the series. (For Parts I, II and III, see National OX5 web pages http://ox5.org that include the March and December 2012, and the March 2013 Newsletters).*

John McCrory's Part III article in the previous March 2013 newsletter closed with "All this was accomplished at College Park, Maryland, however it would not be long before Army flying would return to Texas".

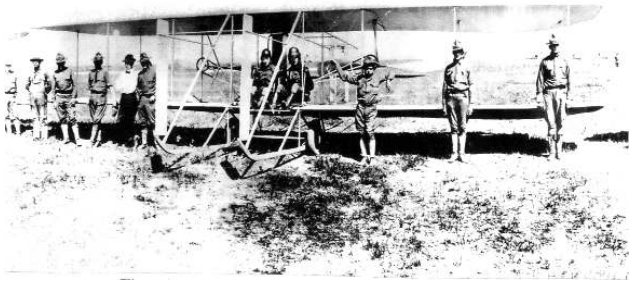
Military Aviation in Texas – A century ago
Part IV

By John McCrory

In February of 1913 the Aeronautical Division ordered Capt. Charles D. F. Chandler, along with four other pilots, twenty-one enlisted men and their Wright airplanes, to report for duty with the 2nd Division at Texas City. All equipment was loaded onto a special train and sent to Texas from Augusta, Georgia, which was the Wright winter training facility. The U. S. Military had begun a buildup along the Mexican border earlier, but now President Porfirio Diaz was overthrown by General Victoriano Huerta, who set up a military dictatorship. U. S. President Wilson assumed office in 1913 and refused to recognize the Huerta Government. Aviation was destined to play a role in U. S. military operations along the border of Texas for years to come.

Capt. Chandler was one of the senior officers of the Signal Corps, dating to 1907. He organized his men into a provisional unit and called it the 1st Aero Squadron. This was designed to be more effective when operating with the second Division Army Units in the field along the border. It was a significant title, and it stuck.

Flying conditions at Texas City were not ideal when the unit became operational in March. Initially the selected flying field was considered satisfactory. However infantry units moved in and reduced the available space on Galveston Bay. These conditions made for limited flying, just as it had for earlier operations at Fort Sam Houston. In addition, only experienced aviators could handle the Wright Model C equipment on hand, especially in wind conditions at the higher temperatures that existed on the coast. It was hot and humid on the bay and there were plenty of mosquitoes. In addition, the pilots were irritated with the leadership of the Aeronautical Division (the senior officers were not aviators at this time), which presented resentment among the rank and file. Finally it became readily apparent that the Army needed a more practical flying machine for duty in the field.



First Aero Squadron at Texas City in early 1913 beside the Wright Model C, No. 11

There were no military hostilities along the border as the political situation calmed down. The use of the aircraft was effective as a show of force. Another beneficial result was the amount of cross-country flying that took place in Texas as spring weather improved. Chandler encouraged this and Lieutenants Milling and Sherman established a new record flight of 200 miles from Texas City to San Antonio in four hours and twenty-two minutes. On the return flight to Texas City, Lt. Sherman made an aerial map as he plotted railroads, bridges, roads, towns and terrain in detail. This was considered the first "sectional chart" used by the military.

Lt. Benjamin Foulois received assignment to Fort Crocket near Galveston at the time as Infantry officer and took advantage of the situation by requesting some flying time from Capt. Chandler, who agreed that he could fly on his time off. He observed the new flying personnel who had arrived with the 1st Aero Squadron and also put on his coveralls and worked on the planes. This field experience was valuable when he was ordered back to Washington to

testify before Congressional committee hearings on “aeronautical matters” – as usual, he “called the shots exactly as he saw them”.

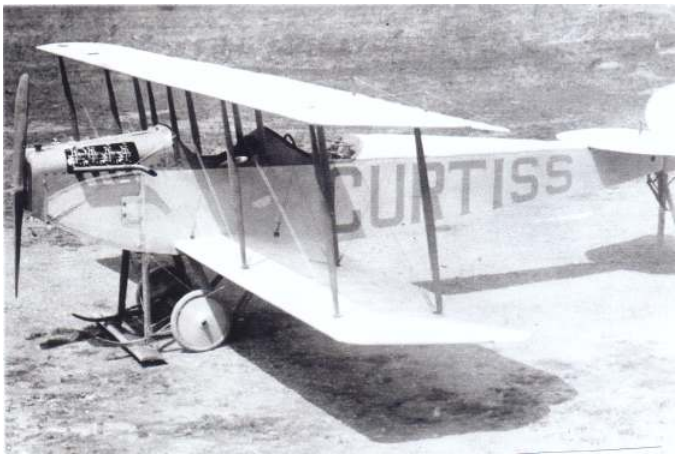
That summer, orders came from headquarters reassigning the 1st Aero Squadron to California. In June the majority of the equipment was packed and sent by train to the Curtiss aviation school in North Island, San Diego, where a great deal of flying was developing. Only a small contingent, two Wright planes, three pilots and 26 enlisted men remained in Texas City until November when they then joined the group in California.

A big decision by the Signal Corps was being considered in late 1913. This important decision was to ground all pusher airplanes, Wright and Curtiss alike, and then condemn them. Of the 33 aeroplanes the Signal Corp purchased and flew up to the grounding in early 1914, a full dozen machines were wrecked or destroyed. In these accidents 13 military pilots died and others were seriously injured. Another way of stating this dangerous work**:** Of the 48 early pilots trained by the Army, 12 were killed – a 25% loss. The pusher airplanes were permanently grounded as being unsafe to fly. Basically this meant that almost the whole aviation fleet was considered and written off. Now more advanced, safe, and durable planes would be forthcoming. A decision was made to acquire only tractor designs, eg. ENGINE AHEAD OF THE PILOT. One of these future designs would actually look like an airplane**!**

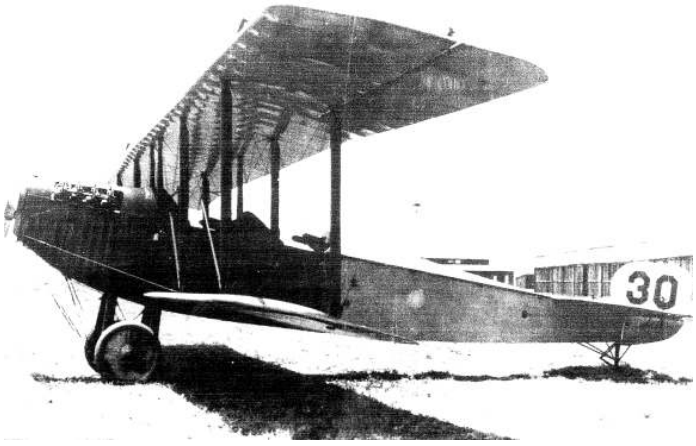
Another development was a change in title. The Aeronautical Division now became the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps. Young unmarried officers were preferred for flying candidates, and thirty-five percent additional pay was now an added incentive. The Military Aviator Badge became a military rating and H. H. Arnold wore one for the rest of his distinguished Air Force career.

Glenn Curtiss got wind of the impending grounding early. One characteristic of Curtiss was that he always demonstrated good judgement. Another was that he always looked for buyers of his products. He had developed practical flying boats by 1912, and took one to Europe during the summer of 1913 to demonstrate it to the British Navy. Also, Curtiss had become more interested in water flying, had invented the amphibian, and became close to the British and U. S. Navy. He demonstrated his flying skills in the flying boat at Shoreham, directly south of London. It was at this time that he made one of the most practical decisions of his aviation career when he hired his first aeronautical design engineer who was working for the Sopwith Company. His name was B. Douglas Thomas. He was given passage to Hammondsport, N.Y., the location of the factory. Curtiss told him to start immediately on a tractor design, with provisions for the propeller mounted on the front of the engine.

B. Douglas Thomas, the young English engineer, promptly sat down and designed the first Curtiss AIRPLANE. It was a tractor design with an OX engine out front and it had TRAILING EDGE AILERONS on the top wing and had two PILOT SEATS IN TANDEM IN A FUSELAGE. It was called the JN and was soon nicknamed the “Jenny”. It was made in large numbers by Curtiss and several other manufacturers, and it became the universal training plane for the American, Canadian, and British in WWI. And it made Glenn Curtiss a wealthy man. **(To be continued).**



The first Curtiss Jenny at the factory in Hammondsport, NY.



Note Sopwith rudder and Curtiss shoulder yokes for aileron control. Army colors of North Island, Signal Corps flying school.

A Texas wing member watches his airplane burn

Probably one of the most distressful things that could happen is watching your favorite airplane being destroyed by fire. And what pilot could have the presence of mind to photograph it as it happened? Well, OX5 member Robert Clark of Miami, Texas, did both of them. Robert and Penni Clark own the Clark Ranch spread near the small city of Miami in the Texas Panhandle. (**Editor note: In Texas, this city name is pronounced "Miamah").** The accident happened at the Clark flight strip on July 2, 2012 a few days after our May Wing meeting in Mineral Wells. Robert sent us his description of the tragedy, along with copies of the official documents that were filed with the FAA and the NTSB.

Robert reported that he was landing solo in his Beech Musketeer Sierra A-24R after a routine flight over his ranch. The airplane pulled to the right during landing flare. He tried to correct the mis-direction, but had no control response and the plane continued to turn to the right. It contacted the ground at 90-100 mph, right wing first, with landing gear extended. The fire started immediately. Robert suffered minor spinal compressions, but managed to evacuate, grab his camera and take pictures as the airplane burned.

The final NTSB report stated**:** "The cockpit control yoke was consumed by the post-impact fire, so a positive determination of the flight control continuity at the time of the accident was not possible".

Robert afterwards said that he lost his "Pride and Joy" in the accident, and its remains will stay at the crash site "forever".

Some of us think that Robert Clark was lucky to have escaped with his life.

On Saturday, June 29, we will see this World War I Jenny trainer at the Call Aviation Field Memorial. It still flies!