

Dear Sean,

I would like to provide the following information concerning the WWI photographs collected and taken by my father William N. Hogan Sr. during WWI.

He was a cadet and then an instructor in the Air Service which was part of the Signal Corps in the US Army. When his group arrived at the place of flying instruction, there were not enough planes to take them all up at one time. While he waited his turn to be wrung out to determine if he really wanted to fly, one of the planes came straight down and crashed in front of them. When his turn came, he started to get in the rear cockpit of the two-seater. His pilot told him to get in the front cockpit and to keep his hands on the cowling where he could see them. He had a monkey wrench and told him if his hands disappeared, he would get the wrench in the back of his head. The crash a few minutes before was caused by the cadet in the rear seat becoming panicky and grabbing the joy stick and freezing when they went into a dive.

I believe they were part of the Signal Corps because their initial responsibility was as spotters for the artillery. Their instructors were Canadian and they used French instruction manuals. The cadets wore officer's uniforms without any rank insignia. They had a white band around their garrison hat, the ones with the bill that were part of the dress uniform to indicate that they were cadets. The Canadian instructors told all the women in town that the white band indicated men with venereal disease so to stay away from them. They, of course, wanted no competition for the girls.

They mounted maps on the cowling of the cockpit, the dashboard if you will, with thumb tacks. Their navigational instructions were to, "...follow the train tracks and turn left at the red barn." The entire flying field was loaded in trucks and moved-after a heavy rainy stretch to drier ground. So they moved the "field" frequently. My son Andy has his leather helmet and his silver wings. Early on, the propellers had steel plates attached to the inside of the blades as the machine guns were not synchronized with the engine. On takeoff, the SOP was to circle the strip so your mechanic on the ground could inform you with hand signals indicating if a wheel or both fell off on takeoff. There were no radios or parachutes for that matter, so forewarned they could land a plane safely, perhaps breaking a propeller. Should trouble occur away from the field an attempt would be made to pancake the craft into a tree. The planes were "Curtis Jennys" and were made by stretching Irish linen over a wooden frame and shrinking it with banana oil paint, much like I made model airplanes when I was a boy. Should the engine throw a spark or otherwise cause a fire it was all over. "Field" designated a temporary area of operations and "Base" a more permanent site. I remember him taking me to the very small memorial service for airmen, attended by pilots of WWI held at the The Aviator Statue in front of the old Linsly Military School that was located where Kroger stands now. That was in the 1930s and 40s.

This is what I recall him telling me when I was young. Should something else occur to me, I will forward it on to you.

Bill Hogan (rec'd by email on 8-21-2012)