

But interest was mounting in heavier-than-air craft, and on February 10, 1908, the Air Service signed a contract with the Wright Brothers of Dayton, Ohio, for what was to be America's first military airplane. The contract called for a plane to carry two men in continuous flight one hour at a speed of no less than forty miles per hour. The Wrights fulfilled both conditions with a speed of slightly better than 42 miles per hour and a sustained flight of one hour and twelve minutes. The speed attained, earned for the Wright Brothers a bonus of \$5000 over the contract price of \$25,000. The final acceptance flight was completed on July 30, 1909.

For a time in 1910, it appeared that military aviation would not survive. In the summer of that year, the Army put two officers and nine enlisted men on aeronautical duty; one airplane, one airship and three balloons. Aeronautical development was at a standstill. The Chief Signal Officer had repeatedly urged congressional appropriations for military aviation without success. By an act of March 3, 1911, however his efforts were rewarded. Congress voted its first appropriation of \$125,000 for aeronautical development. This appropriation permitted the purchase of new equipment for training and reconnaissance work, and enabled the Aeronautical Division to participate as a strategic force in division maneuvers at San Antonio, Texas, from March to July 1911. An aviation school was started at College Park, Maryland; experiments were conducted in aerial photography for reconnaissance work; and in 1911, tests were made firing machine guns from planes. Experiments were also conducted with the Riley Scott bombing device, the invention of a former Army officer. By the summer of 1911, eight officers held airplane pilot certificates and equipment included five airplanes and three balloons. There was now money available for the development of our air arm, but the War Department could not detail the necessary officers to be trained as aviators, due to personnel shortages.

The first airplanes purchased by the Army were necessarily of a commercial type, since the inventors had not applied themselves to the development of a military plane. However it is the opinion of the flying officers that these commercial types lacked sufficient power, speed and carrying capacity for military purposes. Accordingly, specifications were prepared and manufacturers went to work on the development of military aircraft. In 1912 the first machines to meet the new specifications were accepted by the Army.

From June to November 1912, experimental work with an automatic gun (camera) photography and radio was carried on at College Park. By the first of November of that year the Air Service had grown to twelve airplanes housed in eight hangars at College Park., 12 officers, and 39 enlisted men. There were also hangars at San Antonio and Fort Leavenworth.

In February, 1913, College Park, which thus far had been the center of aerial activity, was abandoned in favor of Texas City, Texas. The primary reason for the change was to carry on aviation experimentation close to troop concentrations, in order to practice coordination of air ground maneuvers. Another school was opened at Fort McKinley in the Philippines on March 10, and a third at Hawaii on July 14. On September 30, 1913,

there were 23 officers, and 91 enlisted men on air duty, and the aerial force had grown to 15 airplanes. Meanwhile congressional action of March 2 had provided for 35% extra pay for flying and had limited flying officers strength to 30.

During 1913, several bills were introduced in Congress to elevate the Aeronautical Division to branch status, on a level with, rather than subordinate to, the Signal Corps. The last bill met with violent opposition from Signal Corps officers who appeared before the Military Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives and was subsequently defeated. In its place an act was passed and approved on July 18, 1914, which established, still subordinate to the Signal Corps, an Aviation Section, charged with the operation of all military aircraft, pertinent appliances, signal apparatus installed on aircraft, and training in aeronautics. The strength of the Aviation Section upon passage of the bill was 18 officers, and 104 enlisted men. The act authorized a strength of 60 officers and 260 enlisted men, and established ratings of "Military Aviator", and "Junior Military Aviator", with increases in pay 75% and 50% respectively. A pay increase of 25% was allotted for student flyers. This new law definitely raised the status of military aviation, but restrictions imposed as to marital status and age presented serious difficulties in attaining the authorized strength.

With \$600,000 provided for aeronautical development, Army aviation underwent a period of rapid expansion, An unprecedented amount of flying was accomplished during 1914, and great strides were made in adapting the airplane to military use.

The First Aero Squadron, actually the first United States tactical aviation unit, was organized at San Diego, California, in December, 1913. It consisted of 16 officers, 77 enlisted men, and 6 airplanes.



**Curtiss JN-4, WWI** (Marv Mayo photo)

In the latter half of 1914, Europe was aflame with war, and unprecedented attention was being given to military aviation. An extensive experimental program was started. Testing was conducted on lubricating oils, on various types of propellers, signalling from aircraft by means of Very pistols and smoke bombs for air-ground liaison, the use of radio telegraphy from airplanes, parachutes, bombing and spotting submarine mines. New flight records were made. A portable airport for field use