

186 AERO SQUADRON



MISSION

Observation

LINEAGE

186 Aero Squadron organized, Nov 1917

Demobilized, Aug 1919

STATIONS

Kelly Field, TX

Garden City, NY, Jan 1918

Port of Embarkation, Hoboken, NY, Jan 1918

AEF, Jan 1918

Mitchel Field, NY

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Service Period: February 26 to August 17, 1918

Locations: Castle Bromwich, Li1bourne, Port Meadow, Rendcomb.

To France from Flower Down Camp on August 23. Operated as the 186 Observation Squadron.

This squadron was an Army observation squadron. It was assigned to Mie First Army Observation Group, First Army, October 27, 1918 and reached the Front at Souilly two days later. It participated in the operation of the Argonne-Meuse two offensives. Up to the signing of the Armistice it had suffered no casualties and had never received confirmation for any victories. On April 10, 1919, it was assigned to the Army of Occupation.

Col. Chitty, Commanding Officer, organized the 186th Aero Squadron at Kelly Field, Texas, on or about November 16th, 1917. It consisted of forty men from the 25th Aero Squadron and 110 recruits from Kelly Field No. 1 and was placed under the immediate command of Lt. Stratten, who was the next day relieved by Capt. Chambers. The first official duty of the 186th was operation at the flying school where it was organized. Capt. Chambers was relieved from command by 1st. Lt. Cassias C. Beem on 25th December 1917, who in turn was relieved by Lt. Walter J. Zapf on 20th January 1918. On this date, the 16th, commissioned personnel of the squadron consisted of 1st. Lt. James Robinson, M.C., and 2nd Lt. Carl Weller, A.S. Sig. R.C. Supply Officer. From November 1917 to 20th January 1918 the 186th operated at the flying school there at Kelly Field. Entrained for Garden City, Long Island on 20th January 1918.

The transportation of the squadron from Kelly Field to Garden City, Long Island was accomplished with some good humor, much complaining, a few drunks, a minor accident or two, a few stray kisses administered to the men from patriotic American girls who desired to help make the world "free for democracy", but there were no casualties. The train jumped the track at Basile, La. which gave the men a chance to sample some good Southern liquor. One man was placed under arrest for disorderly conduct. At Washington D.C. the Red Cross ladies served sandwiches and coffee, but no liquor. No arrests were made.

The 186th arrived at Aviation Concentration and Supply Camp No. 2, Garden City, Long Island, only about two miles from Hempstead, on 24th January 1918. At this point most of the troops went A.W.O.L. to visit relatives and others, principally others. The following flying officers were assigned at this station: 1st. Lts. Jos. Werner, J.C. Edwards and J.F. Cameron. After five days through the worst weather that Long Island is capable of, the 186th embarked on the Steamship Adriatic for Liverpool, England.

At Halifax the Adriatic waited for three days for convoy. The northern climate froze you stiff. The squadron was inspected on the deck with the thermometer at sixteen below zero. Three enlisted

men were taken from the ship here on account of mumps. The voyage across the Atlantic lasted sixteen days. Many were seasick and therefore had no fear of submarines. A seasick man had one advantage over the rest; a submarine would relieve his misery. The 186th won the majority of prizes in the boxing contests of the Adriatic, Kid Dayton starred.

The 186th arrived at Liverpool, England on 16th February 1918 where three men were admitted to the hospital, two for measles and the other for suspected meningitis. They left Liverpool the same date, proceeding to Camp Woodley, Romsey, England, arriving late that night. The squadron stayed at Romsey ten days under quarantine during which time all flying and medical personnel were transferred out. The squadron was split here into four flights and sent to different posts in England. The division was as follows: "A" Flight to Lilbourne, near Rugby, in command of Lt. Zapf; "B" Flight to Castle Bromwich, Birmingham, in command of Lt. Walker and "C" and "D" Flights to Rendcombe Aerodrome, near Cirencester, in command of Lt. Lindall where they were turned over to Lt. Herbert F. Guenther, officer in charge of American Troops at that station. All flights were placed under the instruction of the Royal Air Force.

On 5th April 1918, "A" Flight was transferred to Port Meadow Aerodrome, Oxford, England, and "B" Flight to Rendcombe Aerodrome, near Cirencester. At the time "A" Flight was transferred to Oxford, Lt. Zapf was relieved of command of the 186th by Lt. Ray Traxler. During "B" Flights stay in Castle Bromwich, mumps developed and the entire flight was placed under quarantine for three weeks during which time they were put to work on a farm. This flight participated in the Allied parade in the city of Birmingham which was given in the honor of the Red Cross. The flights at Rendcombe went to Cheltenham, England. On 4th July and were entertained by the citizens of the place. There was a baseball game between the 186th and the 199th Aero Squadron, both of which were guests of the town.

While the squadron was in England they received instruction with different types of English planes, some of which are as follows: Bristol Fighters, B.E.2E, Avros, D.H. 6's, R.E. 8's. Camels, Pups and S.E. 5's. This instruction was all practical; the men worked on the planes and were made responsible for their upkeep and efficiency.

On 17th August 1918 all flights were re-assembled in Winchester where they were equipped for duty in France. The 186th started for South Hampton on the 23rd August 1918 where they went into camp awaiting transportation across the Channel. Embarked on board the S.S. Yale at South Hampton on 27th August 1918 and disembarked at Le Havre, France the next morning. The trip was uneventful, no submarines, no German Fleet, no sea monsters. The squadron left Le Havre the next morning in French box cars fittingly called by the men "side door Pullmans". Their destination was unknown to them. After two-day and three nights they arrived in St. Maixent which had been well called the purgatory of the Air Service. While there Lt. Guenther was removed from command and Lt. J.C. Kennedy replaced him. On 7th September the squadron were again loaded in the boxcars and arrived at Air Service Production Center No. 2, Romorantin, after two days of monotonous riding. After one week at Romoratin the 186th was again loaded into the famous side door Pullmans enroute for Colombey-les-Belles, arriving 17th September and proceeded to Autreville Aerodrome from there in trucks.

It was expected that the squadron's stay at Autreville would be no longer than the time necessary to draw supplies and get filled up with pilots and observers. At the time it was realized that a shortage of pilots and observers existed but it was never thought that it would take six weeks to get them ten of each. There were at this time about six squadrons in the neighborhood of Colombey-les-Belles waiting for their flyers. While here ships were drawn, which consisted of eighteen Salmsons. They were equipped with radio and guns, etc., and as far as the airplanes went the squadron was ready for work on the front about 1st October 1918, but as to flying personnel there was only one complete team assigned, one pilot and one observer. At this place all supplies were drawn, including radio equipment, armament, spare parts, etc., but as to transportation it was not thought necessary. One truck was placed at the disposal of the squadron for about six hours a day to draw all the material from Colombey-les Belles. Since all of the radio equipment was new and untried many radio tests from the air were made at Autreville and others were made later.

On the 27th October 1918 the squadron was assigned to the First Army Observation Group and moved again on the 29th, to Souilly for operations. All supplies, personnel, and equipment were transported the same day. The planes were transported by air. At Souilly one truck was all the transportation in the possession of the squadron. This one truck was used to draw rations, for aerial field service, for transportation of personnel to and from town, for hauling water, for all transportation of supplies and for hauling fuel. Outside of this work the truck was always idle.

The 186th participated in the operation of the two Argonne-Meuse offensives. The first trip over the lines were made 5th November 1918, by 2nd Lt. Donald B. Phillips, pilot and 2nd Lt. John B. Holmberg, observer. This plane furnished protection for a plane of the 88th Squadron which was on the same aerodrome with the 186th and was glad to cooperate in permitting our fliers to acquire experience over the lines in company with their old experienced skippers.

The Squadron was held up in starting work over the lines because they were the first American squadron assigned to the long distance reglage work, (flying to strict map coordinates). This was new to them, and it was necessary to make considerable liaisons to the old French squadrons that knew how this work should be done. Also at this time frequent liaisons to the big 14 inchers with which we were to work but they could not help us in our desire to get into operations because the infantry refused to wait until these big "thunder bolts" could follow them, and it happened that the work arranged with one battery came to naught because the dough boys again either forgot us entirely or had no consideration for us or what we were trying to do and deliberately took possession of our coveted target and we, not having the authority to order them back, had to content ourselves with out long range work as it was nothing more or less a dilemma weather (sp) peace was coming or the advance of the infantry would continue so rapidly that the heavy artillery would not have a chance to speak.

On 6th November 1918 they had some more practice in moving. This time the trip was rather short. Nothing more than a jump across the road to Lemmes.

On 8th November, 2nd Lt. Fred C. Griffith, pilot and 2nd Lt. Kenneth F. Potter, Observer, furnished- protection for contact patrol northwest of Verdun.

On 10th November a reconnaissance of German territory within the triangle of towns of Stenay, Montmedy and Olizy was made by 1st Lt. Clarence M. Smith, pilot and 1st Lt. Sidney S. Stocking, observer, and considerable valuable information was brought back but the ending of the war the following day impaired a great deal undoubtedly the value of that information. By the Armistice on 11th November the squadron had suffered no casualties nor had they received confirmation of any victories.

As far as the Squadron were concerned the armistice was signed on 16th November for on that night an entire hangar was set aside for a party which included every enlisted man and every officer in the squadron. There were numerous .speeches and songs not to mention a twenty-piece band from Rampont.

This party lasted into the wee hours of the morning and everyone "did his bit", and it is hard to tell even to this day which was the utmost in the minds of the jolly squadron that night, the signing of the armistice or a celebration of the anniversary of the organization of the 186th Aero Squadron. On 10th April 1919 the 186th was assigned to the Army of Occupation.

USAF Unit Histories
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Sources

US Army Order of Battle 1919-1941. Steven E. Clay. Combat Studies Institute Press. US Army Combined Arms Center. Fort Leavenworth, KS. Nd.