THE VICTORY AT SEA

By ADMIRAL WILLIAM SOWDEN SIMS

AIRCRAFT WORK IN NAVY

Aircraft Spotted Positions and Gave Range of Enemy Submarines—They Were the Eyes of the Navy—Work of Different Men and Different Units — Establishing Aviation Centres Where They Would Do the Most Good.

I have said that the destructive achievements of aircraft figure only moderately in the statistics of the war; this was because most of their most valuable work was done in co-operation with war vessels. Aircraft in the Navy performed a service not unlike that which it performed in the Army. We are all familiar with the picture of airplanes sailing over the field of battle, obtaining information which was wirelessed back to their own forces, "spotting" artillery positions and giving ranges. The seaplanes and dirigibles of the Allied navies performed a similar service on the ocean. To a considerable extent they became the "eyes" of the destroyers and other surface craft, just as the airplanes on the land became the "eyes" of the Army. Part of their equipment was wireless telegraph and wireless telephone; as soon as a submarine was "spotted" the news was immediately flashed broadcast, and every offensive warship anywhere near, as well as the airplane itself, started for the indicated scene. There are several cases in which the sinking of submarines by destroyers was attributed to information wirelessed in this fashion by American aircraft; and, since the air service of the British navy was many times greater than our own, there are many more such "indirect sinkings" credited to the British effort.

How a Dirigible Helped a Convoy.

Besides scouting and "spotting" and bombing, the aerial hunters of the submarine developed great value in escorting convoys. A few dirigibles, located on the flanks of a convoy, exercised almost as great a protective power on them as destroyers themselves; even a single airship not infrequently brought a group of merchantmen and troop ships safely into port. Sometimes the airships operated in this way as auxiliaries to destroyers, while sometimes they operated alone.

In applying this mechanism of protection to merchant convoys, we were simply adopting the method which Great Britain had been using for three years in the narrow passages of the English Channel. Much has been said of the skill with which the British navy transported about 20,000,000 souls back and forth between England and France in four years; and in this great movement seaplanes, dirigibles, and other forms of aircraft played an important part.

In the same way this scheme of protection was found valuable with the coastal convoys, particularly with the convoys which sailed from one French port to another, and from British ports to places in Ireland, Holland or Scandinavia. The Americans established a large aircraft station at Killingholme, England, a little seacoast town near Hull; one of our main duties here was to escort food ships to and from Scandinavian ports. But a considerable amount of work was also done in convoying trans-Atlantic ships. I have described the dangers in which these ships were involved because the groups were obliged to break up after entering the Channel and the Irish Sea, and proceed singly to their destinations. Aircraft improved this situation to a considerable extent, for they could often go to sea, pick up the ships and bring them safely home. The mere fact that our seaplanes, perched high in the air, could see the submarines long before they had reached torpedoing distance, and could, if necessary, signal to a destroyer for assistance, made them exceedingly valuable for this kind of work.

The Yale Aviation Unit.

American naval aviation had a romantic beginning; indeed, the development of our air service from almost nothing to a force which, in European waters, comprised 2,500 officers and 22,000 men, is one of the great accomplishments of the war. It was almost entirely the outcome of civilian enterprise and civilian public spirit. In describing our subchasers I have already paid tribute to the splendid qualities of reserve officers; and our indebtedness to this type of citizen was equally great in the aviation service. I can pay no finer tribute to American youth than to say that the great aircraft force which was ultimately assembled in Europe had its beginnings in a small group of undergraduates at Yale University.

In recommending Mr. Trubee Davison for a Distinguished Service Medal, the commander of our aviation forces wrote: "This officer was responsible for the organization of the first Yale aviation unit of twenty-nine aviators who were later enrolled in the Naval Reserve Flying Corps. . . . This group of aviators formed the nucleus of the first Naval Reserve Flying Corps, and, in fact, may be considered as the nucleus from which the United States Aviation Forces, Foreign Service, after grew." This group of college boys acted entirely on their own initiative. While the United States was still at peace, encouraged only by their own parents, and a few friends, they took up the study of aviation. It was their conviction that the United States would certainly get into the war, and they selected this branch as the one in which they could render greatest service to their country. These young men worked all through the summer of 1916 at Port Washington, Long Island, learning how to fly; at this time they were an entirely unofficial body, paying their own expenses. Ultimately the unit comprised about twenty men; they kept constantly at work, even after college opened in the fall of 1916, and, when the war broke out, they were prepared—for they had actually learned to fly.

When the submarine scares disturbed the Atlantic seaboard in the early months of the war, these Yale undergraduates were sent by the Department scouting over Long Island Sound and other places looking for the imaginary Germans. In February, 1917, Secretary Daniels recognized their work by making Davison a member of the Committee on Aeronautics; in March practically every member of the unit was enrolled in the aviation service; and their names appear among the first one hundred aviators enrolled in the Navy—a list that ultimately included several thousand. So proficient had these undergraduates become that they were used as a nucleus to train our aircraft forces; they became instructors at Buffalo, Bayshore, Hampton Roads, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Key West, and Moorehead City. They began to go abroad in the summer of 1917, and they were impressed as instructors in schools in France and England.

"These young men not only rendered great material service, but they manifested an enthusiasm, an earnestness, and a tireless vigilance which exerted a wonderful influence in strengthening the morale of the whole aviation department. I suppose that this is what is meant by the 'Yale spirit.'" "I knew that whenever we had a member of that Yale unit," says Lieutenant-Commander Edwards, who was aide for aviation in the latter part of the war, "everything was all right. Whenever the French and English asked us to send a couple of our crack men to reenforce a squadron, I would say, 'Let's get some of the Yale gang.' We never made a mistake when we did this."

Men to Whom We Are Indebted.

There were many men in the regular Navy to whom the nation is likewise indebted. Captain T. T. Craven served with very marked distinction as aide for aviation on the staff of Admiral Wilson, and afterward, after the Armistice was signed, as the senior member of the Board which had been appointed to settle all claims with the French Government. Lieutenant (now Commander) Kenneth Whiting was another officer who rendered great service in aviation. Commander Whiting arrived in St. Nazaire, France, on the 5th of June, 1917, in command of the first aeronautic detachment, which consisted of 7 officers and 122 men.

Such were the modest beginnings of American aviation in France. In a short time Commander Whiting was assigned to the command of the large station which was established at Killingholme, and in October, 1917, Captain Hutch I. Cone came from the United States to take charge of the great aviation programme which had now been planned. Captain Cone had for many years enjoyed the reputation of being an efficient administrator; while still a lieutenant-commander, he had held for a considerable time the rank of rear-admiral, as head of the Bureau of Steam Engineering; and in 1917 he was located as commanding naval officer at the Panama Canal. Captain Cone now came to Paris and plunged into the work of organizing naval aviation with all his usual vigor.

It soon became apparent, however, that London would form a better place for his work than Paris and Captain Cone therefore took up his headquarters in Grosvenor Gardens. Under his administration the aviation section grew to the proportions I have indicated. In addition to the twelve stations on the French coast, reaching from Brest almost to Spain, Captain Cone opened four important stations in Ireland, at Lough Foyle, Wexford, Queenstown, and Whiddy Island. Probably the most completely equipped aviation centre we constructed was that at Pauillac, France, under the command of Captain F. T. Evans; here we constructed accommodations for 20,000 men; we had here what would have eventually been a great airplane factory; had the war continued six months longer, we would have been turning out planes in this place on a scale large enough to supply our needs.

Other Centers.

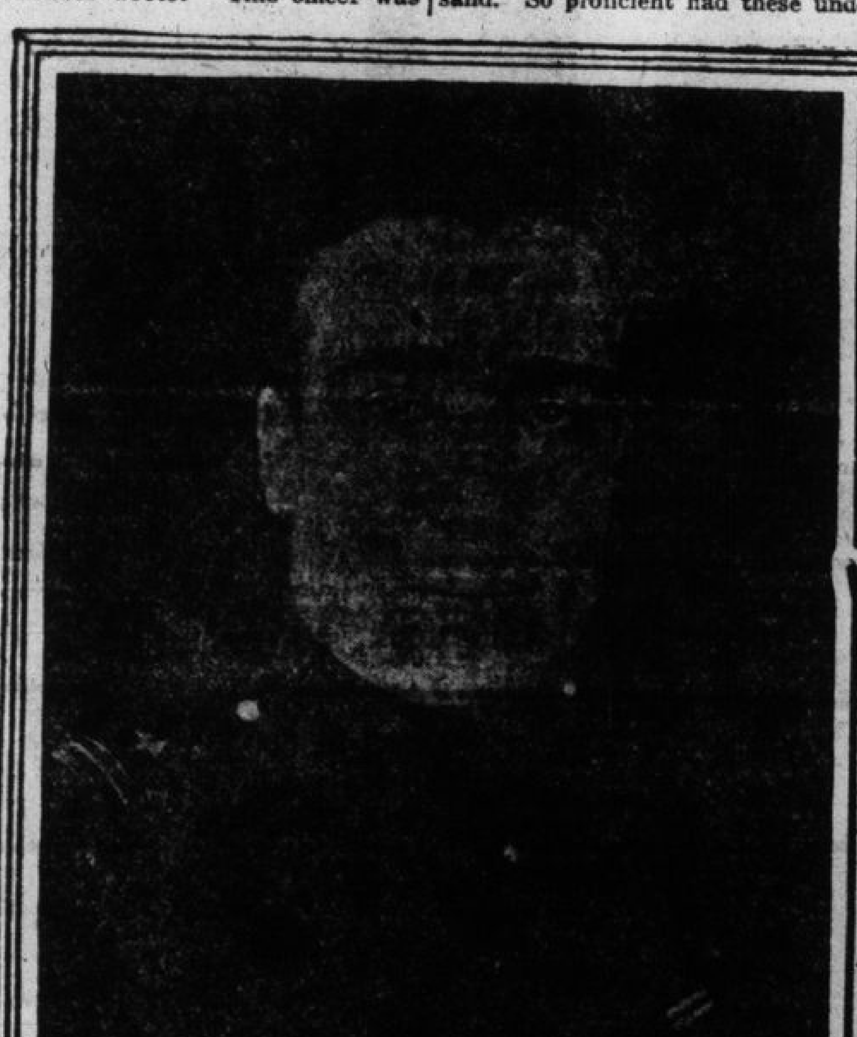
Another great adventure was the establishment of our Northern Bombing Group, under the command of Captain David C. Hanrahan; here we had 112 planes, 305 officers, and 2,239 men, who devoted all their attention to bombing the German submarine bases at Zeebrugge and Ostend. In response to the representations of the Italians, we completed all our plans for building two great aviation bases on the east coast of Italy to attack the Austrian naval bases, but the surrender of Austria put an end to this enterprise.

In September, 1918, Captain Cone's duties took him to Ireland; the ship on which he sailed, the Leinster, was torpedoed in the Irish Sea; Captain Cone was picked up unconscious in the water, and, when taken to the hospital, it was discovered that both his legs were broken. It was therefore necessary to appoint another officer in his stead, and I selected Lieutenant W. A. Edwards, who had served with credit on the destroyer Cushing, and who, for some time, had been second in command to Captain Cone in the aviation section. It was almost unprecedented to put at the head of such an important branch a young lieutenant who had only been out of the naval academy for a few years; ordinarily the duties would have required a man of Admiral's rank. Lieutenant Edwards, however, was not only extremely capable, but he had the gift of getting along splendidly with our English associates, with whom he was very popular. He remained in charge of the department for the rest of the war, winning golden opinions from his superiors and his subordinates, and the Distinguished Service Order from King George.

What Our Aviation Work Accomplished.

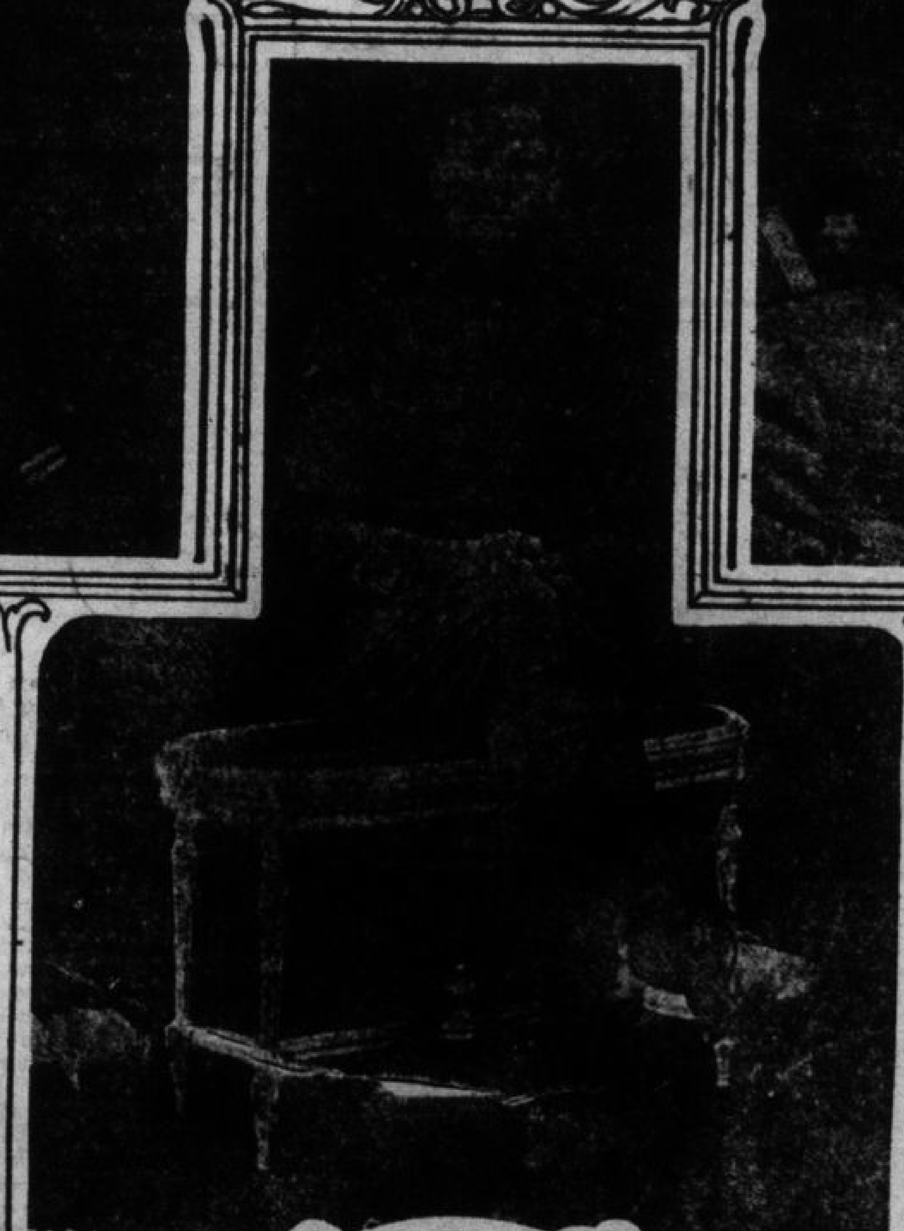
The Armistice was signed before our aviation work had got completely into running order. Yet its accomplishments were creditable; and, had the war lasted a little longer, they would have reached great proportions. Of the thirty-nine direct attacks made on submarines, ten were, in vary degrees, "successful." Perhaps the most amazing hit made by the seaplane in the war was that scored by Ensign J. McNamara; he dropped a bomb from high in the heavens upon a submarine, striking it directly on top of the conning tower; the result partly was tragical, partly ludicrous; for the bomb proved to be a "dud" and did not explode! On the day the Armistice was signed, we had 225 American seaplanes operating over the North Sea, the Irish Sea, the Bay of Biscay, and the Adriatic; our bombing planes were making trips constantly over the fields of Flanders; and 1,500 officers and 15,000 men were making raids, doing patrols, bombing submarines, bombing enemy bases, taking photographs, making reconnaissance over enemy ports and engaging enemy aircraft.

(To be continued)



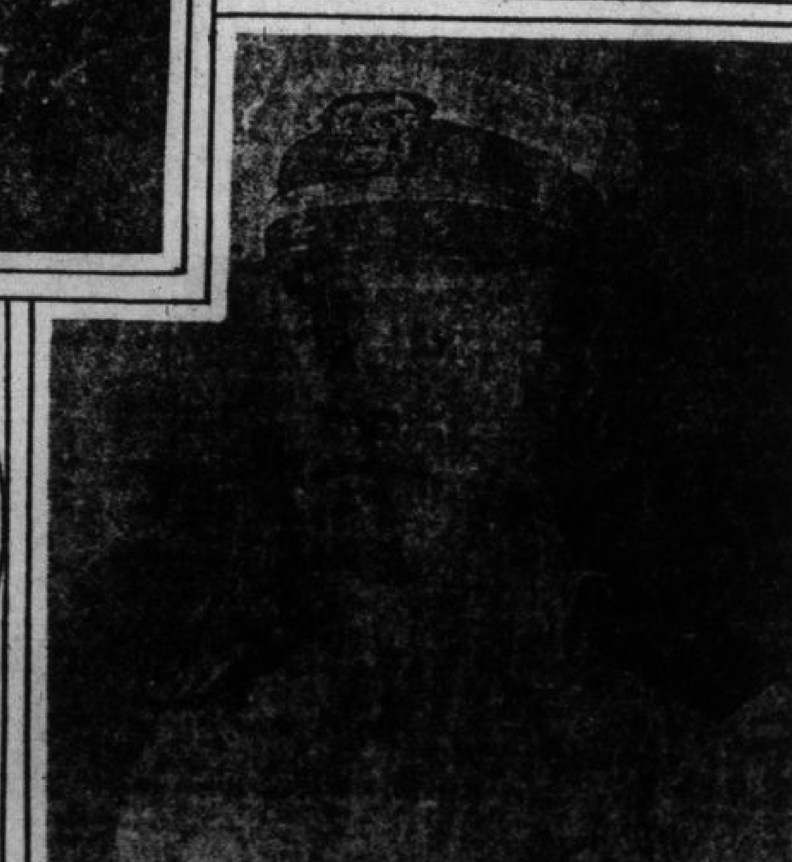
LT.-COM. A. L. GATES

LIEUTENANT KENNETH McLEISH



LIEUTENANT DAVID S. INGALLS

LIEUTENANT TRUBEE DAVISON



LIEUT. KENNETH R. SMITH

FIVE MEMBERS OF THE YALE UNIT

The Yale unit distinguished itself in the naval aviation; it was, indeed, the nucleus from which naval aviation grew. Months before the United States declared war, a group of Yale undergraduates under the leadership of Trubee Davison organized an aviation squad, learned flying at their Long Island Station and thus were ready, when hostilities opened, to sail overseas—a striking illustration of preparedness on private initiative.

30 London Girls Vanish Daily.

The police records of London show that, for every day of the year an average of about 30 girls are reported "missing" in the British metropolis.

A lot of good intentions fail to reach the maturity stage.

The man who harbors envy always has a troublesome guest.

Going to church simply for effect has mighty little good effect.