

BEGINNINGS OF U. S. AIR FORCE 45 YEARS AGO

Fete to Honor Retired General Who Started It All

The Air Force has been termed the most vital arm of the United States military forces today. But 45 years ago it was a single soldier, teaching himself to fly on a \$150 budget and a frail, damaged plane. This is the story of the first pilot and the first flight, which will be commemorated next Wednesday by the Army, Navy and Air Force.

By WILBUR MARTIN

FT. SAM HOUSTON, SAN ANTONIO (Tex.), Feb. 26. — (AP) — The slim young lieutenant could have whooped with delight when he got the terse order from Gen. James Allen:

"Take plenty of spare parts and teach yourself to fly."

The lieutenant was Benjamin D. Foulois, and on that cold December day in 1909 he was the active "air force" of the United States Army.

The "air force" made its first flight on March 2, 1910, almost a month from the day Foulois showed up at this storied military post with a \$150 budget for repairs and a damaged, frail Type B airplane built by the Wright brothers.

That first flight by the first military trained pilot in the first Government plane lasted just seven minutes. But it was the birth of an air force. It gave impetus to aviation all over the world, and, incidentally, cost scores of cavalymen hundreds of dollars in lost bets.

BIG CELEBRATION. To commemorate Foulois' flight forty-five years ago, the Army, Navy and Air Force are going to stage a celebration next Wednesday. A giant barbecue will follow the unveiling of a marker near the site of the pasture where Foulois circled a gaping crowd of thousands.

The honored guest for this ceremony will be Foulois, who retired as a major general in 1935 after serving four years as chief of staff of the Army Air Corps.

When Foulois showed up here February 7, 1910, he was 21, and had fifty-four minutes flying instruction from Wilbur Wright and 128 minutes riding as an observer in a plane with 2nd Lt. Frederick E. Humphreys.

He had never taken a plane off the ground or landed one. But the young Signal Corps lieutenant was under personal orders from the chief of the Signal Corps to start doing both in a hurry.

Foulois graduated from repairing balloons and the United States' first dirigible to flying the rickety planes of the new air age.

He saw Lt. Thomas E. Selfridge, the first Army officer to fly, killed in 1908 in the opening tests to determine whether the airplane would be useful to the Army.

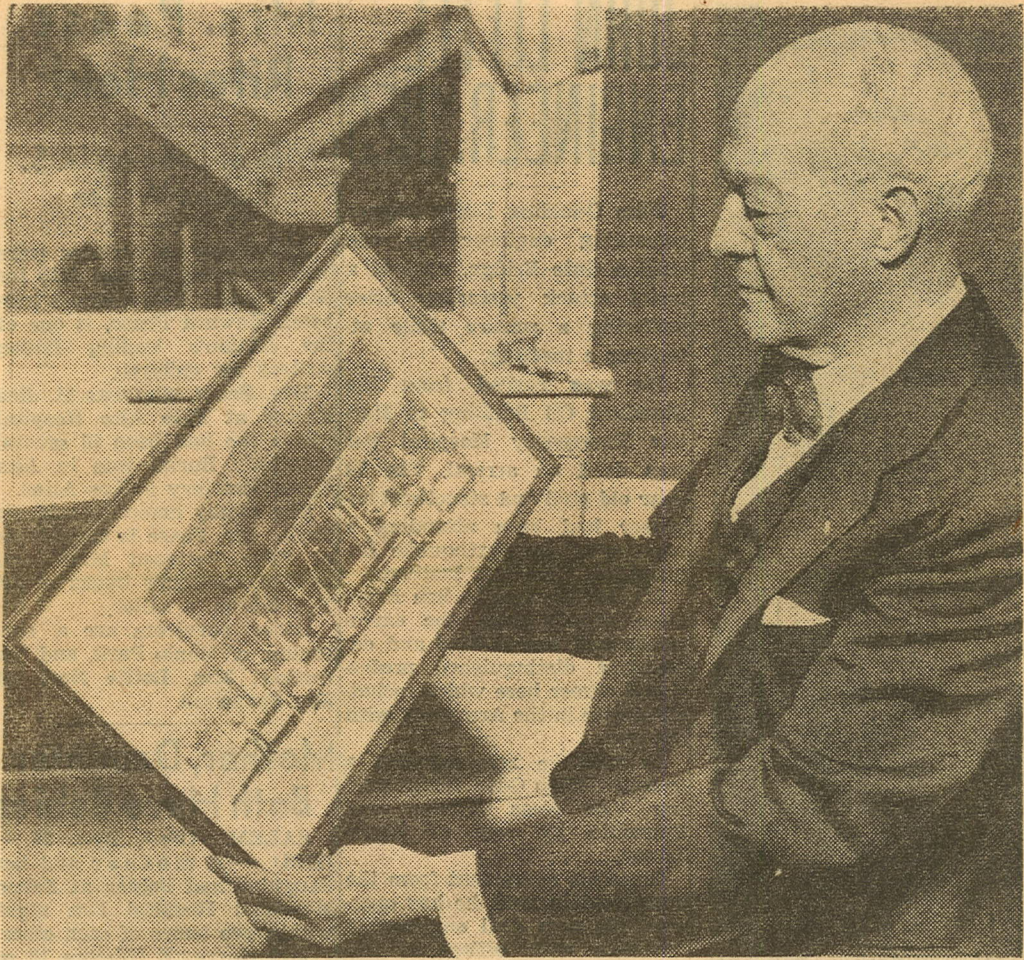
SENT TO EUROPE.

On the last official flight after tests were resumed, Foulois and Orville Wright set a record by flying five miles and back without landing.

Foulois was supposed to be one of two officers to receive flying instruction. But before he could begin, he was ordered to Europe as a delegate to the International Congress of Aeronautics. When he returned, 1st Lt. Frank P. Lahm and Lt. Humphreys, the men who did receive the instruction, had been transferred to other branches of the Army.

And that's when, as Foulois put it, "the infant Air Force of the United States consisted of one partially trained pilot, myself; one badly damaged airplane, eight enlisted mechanics, and one civilian mechanic."

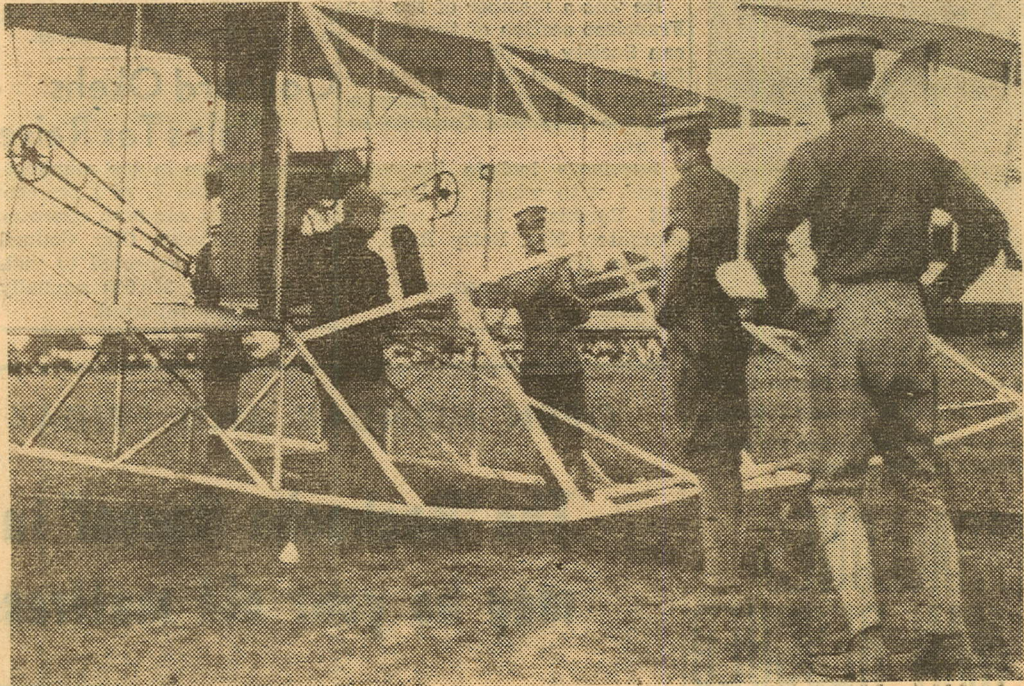
By the time of that first flight, the \$150 the government allotted for repairs had long since been exhausted and Foulois had spent \$300 of his own money.



ONE-MAN FORCE — Maj. Gen. Benjamin D. Foulois (United States Air Force, retired) looks at picture of the original 1910-11 Army Air Detachment, at his home in Ventnor,

N. J. Foulois was the Army's original one-man active "air force." He repaired and flew its first plane in 1910. He will attend the Air Force celebration event this week.

—Associated Press Photo.



BEGINNING — First Lieut. B. D. Foulois (right center) points out to Orville Wright (left center) their course on the flight from Fort Meyer to Alexandria in Virginia, in

the final test of the plane which was to start the original "air force." The date was July 30, 1909. With Wright as pilot and Foulois as observer, the plane flew five miles.

—Associated Press Photo.