

# 463<sup>rd</sup> AERO SQUADRON

## MISSION

## LINEAGE

463<sup>rd</sup> Aero Squadron

## STATIONS

## ASSIGNMENTS

## COMMANDERS

## HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

## EMBLEM

## MOTTO

## NICKNAME

## OPERATIONS

The personnel of the 463rd Aero Squadron was recruited at Fort Logan, Colorado, Recruit Depot, from volunteers who enlisted in the period, from July 24th to August 1st, 1917. This group, to which other volunteers from time to time were added, formed the base of the present unit. They came principally from the Middle Western states and particularly from Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa. On August 3rd, 1917, the group of volunteer recruits entrained for the new Military Reservation to be known as Kelly Field, South San Antonio, and where after a lone hot journey of three days and the sultry welcome of the Texas sun they arrived to net their first real military experience. Upon detraining the recruits were marched to

a quarantine camp, assailed on route by all manners of jeers, hoots, and witticisms from other rookies, who, it was learned, had arrived a few days before. Upon reaching the quarantine camp the men were assigned to a double row of khaki tents, where they were quartered for a period of ten days pending the development of contagious diseases and where at the same time they underwent a series of inoculations against typhoid fever and smallpox.

The organization of the squadron began immediately and the unit was designated as the 51st Provisional Aero squadron. Confirmation orders came from Headquarters a few days later making it the 51st Aero squadron; a fledgling, but nevertheless destined to a sturdy growth and a part to play which should end only when Germany should fall and the Rhine was reached.

John Pollock, a sergeant awaiting commission, was assigned as the first Commander. The squadron after several days received its much needed equipment and with a few days drill and lectures on military courtesies began to take on the appearance of a military organization. For the first time in their lives these men from all walks of civil life realized that they were soldiers of the United States Army.

Quarantine being lifted, the squadron was removed to barracks where many more conveniences were at hand and liberty to visit an Antonio was granted. About this time, August 23rd, a telegram was received from the Chief Signal Officer designating the organization as an Aero Reconnaissance squadron with Major Edward L. Hoffman in command.

On September 1st Major Hoffman was relieved of command of the squadron by Captain Frank H. Maguire who initiated immediate preparations for service overseas. Transfers were many, and although the original group remained in part, the organization became a unit composed of men from more than one half of the states of the Union. After a period of strenuous drill the squadron participated in a grand review, along with seven other reconnaissance squadrons, before General Wheeler who decided that the troops were sufficiently trained and disciplined for service overseas. Consequently the eight squadrons were placed under travel orders; full equipment was drawn and everything made ready for departure. Instructions to entrain for the aviation camp at Mineola, Long Island, were received on September 16th, 1917, but unfortunately departure was delayed until three o'clock, September 17th when at last two long trains bore the "Wet" construction squadrons and their accoutrements away from the yards of South Denison at Lancaster this unit on the first phase of the long journey whose final destination was not to be gained until seventeen months later when it camped on the heights of Coblenz overlooking the Rhine.

Our trip across the United States was made interesting by many novel events. American enthusiasm now fully awakened was evinced in a hundred ways.

At Texarkana, Chattanooga, and Roanoke, we stopped to parade for the benefit of the recruiting committee in full swing, and everywhere our passing was heralded with cheers and hearty wishes for our future welfare.

The squadron arrived at Mineola on September 21st, 1917, and was assigned to tented quarters on Hazelhurst Field No. 2, opposite the famous Esadebrook Polo Grounds. The three weeks occupancy of this post passed very quickly, the squadron taking advantage of every minute in preparing itself for overseas service. Each day's routine, was crowded with formations and drills of many kinds and with lectures on many subjects relating to the military life. A high standard of efficiency had been set for the squadron by its rapid, assimilation of the new studies, its still more rapid adaptation to the camp life augured a successful unit; while the receipt of the last items of equipment including construction tools and appliances pointed to a speedy release to France.

During the brief stay at Mineola every enjoyable hour was spent with the people of Mineola, Garden City, and Hempstead. The hospitality they offered and the many courtesies they extended to the soldiers by opening their homes, providing entertainments and amusement not only helped the spirit of the times, but instilled a deep gratitude in the hearts of the men who will always hold them in the highest esteem.

On October 10th, 1917, word was passed thru the camp that the eight construction squadrons were to leave for overseas service. Every preparation for departure was made and during the afternoon of October 11th, the official order (mine to break camp). The packing of squadron equipment, the preparation of final reports, and various other activities that are necessary in the movement of troops lasted all that night. By noon of the following day the entire camp was ready to depart, but it was not until six o'clock that evening that the plan of procedure was made known.

Accordingly at 1445 a.m. October 13th, 1917, the squadron left camp in heavy marching order, hiking thru the mud and darkness to Garden City, Lone Island, where a troop train stood in readiness to convey them to the port of embarkation. At daybreak a ferry carried them from Long Island City to Pier 54 at the foot of Tenth Avenue, New York City where the S.S. Pannonia was awaiting to take these soldiers overseas. Behind closed doors and without any spectacular farewell or goodbye scenes, the men marched onto the boat and at 1030 a.m. on the morning of October 13th, the transport passed the Statue of Liberty bound for France. A little way out into the ocean the vessel was incorporated into a convoy of fifteen ships, some carrying troops, others freight and supplies, accompanied by one battle cruiser which was to protect the convoy against enemy sea-rafts. At four o'clock in the afternoon the ships having planned themselves in proper position were soon sailing under full steam for the old world.

The first ten days were uneventful and pleasant, the sea was calm, the sun shone from a beautiful blue sky dotted only with white clouds. Many pleasant hours were spent on the decks of the ship and the spirit of these new soldiers was wonderful. Even with bad food and their crowded quarters they were contented, and soon accustomed themselves to these new conditions. As due time the men were assigned to the lifeboats and rafts, drills were organized to facilitate orderly movements, lookouts were posted, smoking was prohibited on deck, all lights were carefully screened; and, as further protection, a gunner manned a six inch gun on the boat.

On the evening of October 23rd, the sea began to roll considerably. There was a heavy rain and when the morning of the 24th dawned the ocean was a raging mass of water and foam. It was a storm such as the crew had not encountered in eleven, years. It scattered the convoy in every direction and for twelve hours the ship was forced to turn its nose westward and head into the gale. After thirty-six hours the storm abated and the sea calmed allowing the vessel to proceed. We were now in the danger zone sailing toward the nearest port unescorted.

About ten o'clock on the morning of October 27th a welcome sight greeted the ship's passengers. Two British destroyers were making for us to convoy the ship into a nearby port. At one o'clock on the same day the high hills off the northern coast of Ireland were sighted, and for the first time in fourteen days land was seen.

The ship entered a little port named Look Soutilly at five o'clock that evening but remained at this place only two hours when orders to proceed onward were received. At seven o'clock the Pannonia once more started out and at six o'clock the next morning, October 8th, 1917, we dropped anchor in Belfast harbor. The vessel remained at that place until midnight, when the anchor was hoisted and the last lap of the voyage was made. It was a quiet uneventful trip across the Irish sea, and by midday, October 29th, the city of Liverpool, England was sighted. At high tide the ship entered the harbor, made its way down the Mersey River and at four o'clock the next afternoon fifteen bemired men set their feet on ground for the first time in sixteen days. A train was waiting at the station to transport the troops across England and all were sent on to Camp Borden, with the exception of a detail composed of twelve men under First Lieutenant E. H. Wilson. This detail remained four weeks in Liverpool, unloading, checking, and arranging for the reshipping of the equipment of the eight construction squadrons to France.

In the early hours of the morning of October 30th, 1917, in a pouring rain the ship reached Camp Borden, where the troops were to wait for further orders. The first air raid was experienced here on the night of October 30th, 1917, when German raiders visited London, thereby causing the alert to be sounded in the outlying districts.

On November 1st, 1917, the squadron entrained for Southampton and upon arrival embarked for Le Havre on the transport Renee Viper. At Le Havre quarters were secured at a rest camp where the men were granted a day for recuperation before the monotonous and tedious journey which, however, had not dampened the spirits of the men who were buoyed up by the expectancy of the future, after four days and four nights of tiresome travel on a train of bumpy box cars brought the 51st Aero Squadron to its first post of duty in France.

This cantonment is situated at a distance some eight kilometers to the north of Issoudun. The purpose of this center was to induct and train military aviators for the front, the course being carried out in its various stages in eight separate fields centering about the main camp. A hangar was assigned as quarters for the squadron and here the men endured many hardships due to insufficient housing, very inadequate facilities for drying their clothes, which were always water soaked from the incessant rains and lack of proper foot wear. Construction work began at once.

At that time only a few new barracks and hangars had been erected, a mere skeleton of what was to follow. At first the entire squadron was entailed for road operations at which it continued, to a greater or lesser extent while at this station. As time went on details were placed on various phases of the work, such as barracks, electrical, water works, narrow gauge railway, and structural steel construction. Several sergeants were placed in charge of groups of German prisoners, while six chauffeurs were temporarily transferred to the transportation service. In four months time, against terrific odds in the way of adverse weather conditions under which the men were obliged to work at all times, insufficient equipment for construction work, and lack of organization, a small city with a water system supplied by water tower one hundred feet in height, to which were connected several sub-reservoirs; an electric light plant, paved streets, two spacious Y.M.C.A. huts and a commodious Red Cross establishment, a hospital, Quartermaster depot, machine shops, barracks, and hangars had been constructed in one of the muddiest holes in France. The largest and most important enterprises attempted by the squadron were the erection and completion of both the hospital and Red Cross units for which the organization received much praise and approbation from the officers in charge of the field. Assistance was also lent to other organizations engaged in the construction of hangars, Y.M.C.A. huts, and machine shops; while a picked detail established an unequalled record in the erection of portable barracks.

After six weeks of existence in the hangars the squadron was moved to much more comfortable quarters in barracks. If the deplorable conditions under which the men were obliged to live are given consideration it was indeed surprising that serious illness did not prevail to a greater extent. However, a strict quarantine was maintained at all times which accounts for the fact that no dangerous contagious disease became epidemic, excepting the prevalence of measles and mumps. About this time, in accordance with the reorganization of the Air Service, the squadron was designated as the 463rd. Aero Squadron.

It was at this post that the first Christmas was spent and it will always be remembered. Most of the men received Christmas packages from home, and the Y.M.C.A. and Red Cross brought cheer into the camp by distributing a Christmas box to every man, and a victrola to every squadron.

Football teams were organized and many interesting contests were enjoyed on Sundays and holidays.

By the first of February construction work at this post was fast coming to a close and it was made known that the construction squadrons would soon be leaving to perform similar duties at other posts in France.

On February 23rd, 1918 this organization received orders to proceed to a place the First Air Depot was to be constructed. It was in the Zone of Advance and near the front, so orders to move to such a location were received with no little excitement, and with much satisfaction by every man of the squadron. At six o'clock in the morning of February 24th, after having spent the entire night in packing, the squadron entrained at the post depot and by 7:30 a.m. were on

their way north. It required two days and nights to complete the journey and at 6 o'clock on a cold, raw morning, the squadron detrained at the little town of Barisey-la-Cote, which was about one kilometer from the new post. After a breakfast of hot coffee and bread the men marched down the road to their new station, the first zero Oouadron of its kind to come into the Zone of Advance.

This post had already been organized and a few barracks erected, but it was only a start on the proposed project so a big task was in store for this construction squadron. Twenty-four were allotted for the men to get settled and the day after our arrival operations began. A crushed stone road leading from a main highway into and thru the camp was started. Barracks, shops, and bombproofs were a part of the program and these were all under way in a short time. During the first three weeks incessant rains and considerable snow handicapped the work to some extent; but very little time was lost, and in four weeks much had been accomplished. One kilometer of crushed stone road, wide enough for two vehicles to pass, had been built, five barracks, two shops and warehouses, and six Owiss huts were erected. A detail of six men also received their first lessons in the art of camouflaging, which experience proved of great value.

By the middle of April a sufficient number of barracks to house the much needed mechanical and clerical personnel, shops for the aeroplane work were ready so once more the squadron awaited orders to proceed to a new project.

While at the First Air Depot Captain Frank R. Maguire rejoined the squadron thereby assuming command and relieving First Lieutenant C. H. Ohlson, but owing to orders placing him on detached service at another post he was with the organization only a few days.

On April 15th orders from the Air Service ordered the squadron to a new station. Five trucks, a motorcycle, and a Fiat touring car were added to our equipment. With these and a complete set of construction tools, which had been received while at the First Air Depot, the unit proceeded to its new station.

This post was located one kilometer east of Oolombey-la-Belle, and two kilometers from the First Air Depot. It was an entirely new proposition and the squadron operating by itself for the first time was to build a flying field on two hundred acres of French farm land, and to erect barracks, shops, and hangars necessary for the operations of four Bombing Squadrons.

Owing to weather conditions which were particularly bad at that time of the year, it was impossible to do any work on the field, so the entire squadron began construction of barracks. These were to be built in a piece of woods just across from the flying field. They were placed in rows of five, with one hundred feet between each, and also irregular as to placement. The roofs were covered with evergreen boughs and this, together with the irregular alignment and natural forest, made an exceptionally well camouflaged camp.

Weather conditions changed which permitted work on the flying field to begin. To put this field into good condition it was necessary to plow, harrow, drag, roll, and seed the entire ground.

Three tractors, two 4-share plows, a two disc harrows, and six rollers became a part of our equipment, all being used in the construction of the field, and twenty horses from a veterinary hospital were also used in this work. A detail of thirty-five men with all this equipment worked night and day for seven weeks preparing this flying field. It was no small task. There were many hollows and small ditches to be filled in; there were many ridges and knolls to be smoothed down, all of which required much hard work and interest in the part of men assigned to this work. When the machinery became broken the men of this detail repaired it, various pieces of farm machinery were actually made and put into use by these men.

The hauling of material, supplies, and equipment necessitated more transportation which, after much effort was obtained. Ten 3-ton Liberty trucks were added to the squadron transportation. The organization now had a total of nineteen pieces of transportation this making it a very mobile unit, and with this and all our equipment the squadron could successfully handle any piece of construction work laid out for it.

By the first of July the Airdrome was in a completed state. In the little forest above mentioned twenty-five barracks and mess halls with a dozen huts scattered between them had been constructed. Four fields of about two hundred and fifty acres had been plowed, harrowed, rolled, and seeded with five tons of grass seed. Along one side of the field and in the forest twelve hangar sites had been cleared. Fifteen hundred feet of crushed rock road was also built thru the camp and many small stone and cinder paths connected the buildings to parking space one hundred by two hundred fifty feet from which a road led to a machine shop was also part of the project.

Outside of regular duty many enjoyable hours were spent both by the men and officers while at this post. Baseball games were frequent, games being played with other squadrons both at our field and at other posts. The fourth of July was celebrated in such a way as never to be forgotten. Athletic contests were indulged in during the morning and at noon the men and officers met together out in the open under cover of the open forest where they enjoyed their fourth of July dinner.

First Lieutenants L. L. Holmes, J. K. Wilcox, W. W. Bryne, and Second Lieutenant Henry G. Wilson were attached to the squadron at this post, but owing to the demand for officers on other projects the last-named were sent to other posts upon the completion of the Colombey Airdrome. Captain F. H. Maguire also returned and assumed the duties as Commanding Officer of the squadron relieving First Lieutenant O. H. Chilson. During the last three weeks at this place many restless nights were spent due to the air raids carried on by the Germans. They were a nightly occurrence but two large bombproof shelters capable of holding a hundred men each offered ample protection and fortunately no one was injured.

On July 16th this Air Field being ready for occupancy the squadron received orders to proceed to another air field.

It comprised three hundred fifty acres of land about half of which was under cultivation with

potatoes, three thousand bushels of the latter being dug and delivered to the Quartermaster, United States Army. Six tractors, two gang plows, six disc harrows, four large rollers, and thirty-five horses were used in the preparation of this field. Buildings were to be constructed until late in the fall at this field so the entire Squadron was engineering field work. With all the machinery and man power this field required completion in a months time. Consequently the squadron was divided into three details, one moving to field near the town of Iartigny on the main road between Colombey-les-Belles and Reufchateau, the other to a field one kilometer west of the main road. These new projects were just started when the squadron received orders that it had been transferred into the First Army and was to operate for an indefinite time with the VIII French army.

On August 26th these unfinished projects were abandoned and the 463rd Aero Squadron moved to Colombey-les-Belles. The organization remained here for a week doing a little repair work on the field and on Sunday, September 1st, 1910 a French Army Truck Train transported the squadron to its new location.

While at the St. Blin Air Field Captain V. H. Maguire was relieved from duty with this squadron and ordered to Roma, Italy, his successor being First Lieutenant Willcox who assumed command in August.

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Air Force Order of Battle  
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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.