

148 AERO SQUADRON



MISSION

Pursuit

LINEAGE

148th Aero Squadron organized, Nov 1917
Demobilized, Apr 1919

STATIONS

Kelly Field, TX
Taliaferro Field, #2, TX
Garden City, NY, Feb 1918
Port of Embarkation, Hoboken, NY, Feb 1918
AEF, Feb 1918
Garden City, NY

ASSIGNMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The tactical history of American pursuit would be incomplete without reference to American pilots and units with the Royal Air Force. Of the 216 pilots sent to the Royal Air Force in the field, some served in British squadrons, but two wholly American aero squadrons, the 17th and 148th, operated under British wings, in all respects on the same footing as British units. Still others of the pilots trained in England, who were intended to be employed in the American night bombardment program, were sent to the Independent Force, Royal Air Force, and later returned to England to act as instructors in the American Expeditionary Forces school. Confirmed casualties inflicted upon enemy aircraft by Americans serving with the British totaled 225, whereas their battle casualties were 71, or a superiority of 3 to 1.8

The 148th Aero Squadron was likewise formed at Kelly Field, Tex., on November 11, With its complement of flyers from Fort Worth, it sailed for England in February, As with the 17th, the flying officers were sent to English flying schools and the squadron to the Royal Air Force in the field. It was on July 20 that the first flight was made by the squadron over the lines from the Cappelle airdrome near Dunkirk. The officers of the squadron were not those who had accompanied it overseas, but were other American flyers trained in England who had already been engaged in war flying with the British. After three weeks of preliminary work on the Nieuport-Ypres front, the 148th Squadron was sent to the British 4th Army operating from Albert to Roye, and shortly began its share in the drive on Cambrai. The dropping of 20-pound bombs on the retreating enemy became a daily feature of the squadron's work, as did the use of machine-gun fire against ground targets. The squadron advanced with the British and was engaged in all actions in its sector. During the bitterly contested retreat of the enemy, the 148th advanced from Albert to the Canal-du-Nord, thence to Le Gateau, and finally to Le Quesnoy. With the 17th Squadron, 11 it was ordered to the American front on October 28th. The two squadrons proceeded to Toul, but were not again engaged in active operations before the signing of the armistice. In the course of its work the 148th American Squadron destroyed 66 (confirmed) 12 enemy aircraft. In accomplishing this it suffered but 11 casualties. In all 2,100 hours were spent over the enemy lines in offensive patrols, low bombing and "strafing" raids, and attacks on balloons. Three of its members were decorated with the British distinguished flying cross and one with the distinguished service cross.

The individual pilots with British squadrons and the two American squadrons serving with the Royal Air Force were all many times commended by the officers of the Royal Air Force under whom they served directly and also by the General Officer commanding the Royal Air Force in the Field.

With the RAF on the front from July 8th, 1918 to October 28th, 1918. 66 Huns shot down according to British official confirmation, in 1725 hours of offensive patrols. 30000 pounds of bombs dropped, in 385 hours additional of ground strafing. Distinguished Flying Cross awarded to Lieutenants Kindley, Clay, Springs, Callahan, Bissell, and Creech.

If you remember March 1918 you remember how the Hun was knocking them right and left. Well—that's why the men of the 148th squadron went straight off to France while the pilots went to flying schools.

Arrived at Le Havre, the outfit was split into three bunches and started for the lines to get experience with the R. F. C. squadrons on active service. They got it from the start. "H. Q" and "A" flights started for Ham. When they got to Chaulnes the R. T. O. told them that Ham was in No Man's Land. While they were waiting there that night old Jerry came along and dropped a nice fat bomb down beside the train killing nine men in the squadron and wounding that many more.

"B" Flight started for Albert. The Huns welcomed them by shelling the train and knocking the engine off the track so they had to go ahead to No. 43 squadron on foot. They couldn't hit "C" Flight so they got clear up to their destination with No. 43 at Merville. Talk about being initiated! Is there anything worse than pulling off a retreat, moving the aerodrome every other day while the Huns were shelling it, and keeping the patrols going all the time?

Eventually, if not right now, the German advance was stopped and ordinary warfare went on till at last it was decided to make 148 into a real service squadron with "Yank" pilots, Clerget Camels and everything. The first of July the whole bunch got together at Dunkirk, "Mort" Newhall came along to be the new C. O., Eliot Springs, Henry Clay and "Bim" Oliver to be flight commanders, with Field Kindley, "Zip" Zistell, George Whiting, "Jinks" Jerfanson and Wylie, who had all been attached to various R. F. C. squadrons, seeing the war and getting some Huns. The rest of the pilots were all new "Yanks" fresh from the training schools in England.

By the 8th, the machines were all ready, the bar all stocked up, and line patrols begun in order to get the men accustomed to the country, shot at by "Archie", and steady in formation. Five days later while line patrolling, some four miles beyond the lines, Kindley saw the first Hun, administered the proper treatment and started the score.

As soon as the squadron was ready for real work they were given the job of day by day escorting the bombers to Dunkerque, out to sea, up to the edge of Holland, down to Zeebrugge, to bomb the mole and the subs, and back home thru the "Hun Hate". Meanwhile, Springs and Kindley collected another Hun apiece, and the new men learned how to behave.

Getting Huns while on escort work being rather difficult business, and Huns being rather scarce on

this particular bit of front, at Major Fowler's request the squadron was moved on August 10th to Allonville, to work on the Albert—Villers-Bretonneux front, where with the push before Amiens in full swing there was "beaucoup" aerial activity.

The first show from the Allonville "drome" on the 13th of August was a "Low Recon" to find out who held Roye. That afternoon on the second show, an offensive patrol, six two-seaters were located. Kindley, Seiboldt and Wylie picked off one each. Wylie "failed to return", but was located all O. K. that night, having landed just back of our lines with a 'dud' engine.

During the last part of the month the score began to move right along in spite of the fact that about half the work was "ground strafing".

The first of September, in preparation for the pushes for Cambrai, the Squadron was moved north to Doullens. Here came the "one worst day". While touring around on a "low show" over the environs of Cambrai, about eight miles over, a patrol of eight was "lept" on by a flock of twenty five Fokkers. When they had fought their way back home, Kenyon, Frobisher, Foster and Mandell were missing, Knox and Kindley had a Hun apiece and Kindley had his goggles shot through. It was a bad day for sure, but it was the only time that 148 ever lost more pilots than she got Huns.

During September the war became less and less of a "pink tea" so that about the time the Hindenburg line was beginning to feel the strain, the Staff had made the wonderful discovery that on days when it rained or when the clouds were low, and when according to tradition, custom and all moral law, pilots should be given a rest, it was possible to fly and shoot up the troops and worry the transport with twenty pound bombs. 3.00 A. M. to 9:30 P. M., it was one continuous round of aviation. The only thing that kept patrols from going out more often seemed to be the inability of the Staff to get the orders out faster.

By the 20th of September the war had gotten so far away from the aerodrome at Doullens that the squadron was moved up to Albert. Here, in the odd, leisure minute and a half, the pilots could enjoy the advantages of scenery which had been reduced to a state of liquid glue by four years continuous shell fire. The same day too "Jinks" Jenkinson went down in flames after as stout a fight against big odds as ever a pilot put up.

As a bit of revenge for the loss of old "Jenks" on the 24th a patrol of fifteen located and engaged an enemy patrol of fifteen from the famous 2nd Bavarian Pursuit Group. This bunch was locally known as the "Blue Tails" and were generally considered the hottest aggregation of Hun pilots working on the entire front. The scrap lasted 20 minutes by the clock. Seven of the "Blue Tails" went down to get their Wooden Crosses" while the best the Huns could do was to puncture the wings of several of the Camels. Every man remembers it as by far the hardest scrap he ever saw. 17 Squadron had taken a crack at the same outfit earlier the same morning, copped off five and sent the sixth down out of control. Intelligence came through a few days later with news from a German captured document saying that the 2nd Bavarian Pursuit Group had been withdrawn from the front on account of casualties.

On the twenty-seventh, Avery, while "ground strafing", went down a prisoner behind the German lines. The next day as he was being marched back along the road, he had the pleasure of being just missed by a bomb from his own squadron as they came down the road at about fifty feet, bombing and shooting. Later, on being questioned by a German squadron commander he was told, "Yes, I know what squadron you are from and I wish to Hell that they would take you Yanks off of this front for you have gotten down some of the best pilots we had".

By the middle of October the fatigue details had gotten nearly all the shell holes in the Albert aerodrome filled in so that it was possible to land with a fair margin of safety. Immediately, the squadron was moved to a new, freshly shelled one just outside of Bapaume.

On the night of the twentieth a Hun night bomber kept Bissell and Wylie from getting the required amount of sleep, so just before dawn they took off with bombs, went all the way over to Valenciennes, blew up the station and a troop train from about fifty feet, shot up the troops and came back and went to bed. For all this the General came down that afternoon personally, to pat them on the back.

Alternating with rumors of peace, all through the month of October, there had been rumors that the Squadron was to be removed from the R. A. F. and sent to the American front to fly Spads. Everyone solemnly swore that they would resign their commissions if this came true. Then it did come true in the form of orders to report to Colombey-les-Belles. No one resigned, though two thirds of the squadron tried to commit suicide by drinking all the (deleted by the W. C. T. U.).

Monday, the twenty-eighth, while on squadron patrol, eight Fokkers were sighted. There followed one of the prettiest shows of the year. Kindley lead his flight below for bait while Moore and Callahan lead the two top flights out of sight in the clouds. The Huns fell for the old trap and the two top flights fell into the scrap like a ton of bricks. Some Hun Commander is wondering yet what ever happened to eight of his machines, for they are all toasting their shins with von Richthofen now. "All of our machines returned safely." Bissell had added two to his score, and six others had one apiece.

This show so pleased the General that he declared the next and last day of the Squadron under the R. A. F. orders, a holiday.

The parting scenes are not published at the request of the Anti-Saloon League except to state several good Hun destroyers shed actual tears when they parted with their faithful Camels and turned their minds towards Spads, and that even General Bane came down to the train to say "Cheer-O".

The Squadron came to the Second American Army and the Fourth Pursuit Group, bringing with them the records of sixty six British official Huns destroyed, with the loss of four pilots killed, four prisoners and three wounded. They had flown 1700 hours on offensive patrols, 385 hours shooting up the troops and low bombing, twenty five hours of shooting at balloons, sending their love to the Crown Prince's gang in the form of thirty thousand pounds of twenty pound bombs and so many rounds of ammunition that no one could keep count. Henry Clay had hung up the remarkable stunt of leading his flight through the whole mess without the loss of a single man. Kindley, Clay, Springs, Callahan,

Bissell and Creech had all raised a sufficiently high mortality rate among the Huns to get the Distinguished Flying Cross.

A few days at the Toul Aerodrome, learning to fly Spads—(opinions of pilots deleted in view of certain articles of war)—and along came the armistice. Soon after the war ended the outfit was broken up and the pilots all sent, home while the men went some place near St. Maixent, where they remain to this very day, doing fatigue in the mud and wondering if they will be remembered and sent home in time to volunteer for the next war.

One Hundred Forty-eighth: The head of Liberty in a circle was the insignia of the One Hundred Forty-eighth Aero Squadron. The One Hundred Forty-eighth Squadron was a pursuit squadron. It was assigned to the Fourth Pursuit Group, Second Army, November 4, 1918. This squadron had previously been assigned with the Royal Air Force July 20, 1918, and had taken part in British operations up until it had been assigned to the Second Army. This squadron had accomplished many patrols over the enemy lines, fought 107 combats and received official confirmation for 71 victories. The squadron suffered 11 casualties, consisting of 3 killed, 3 wounded, 4 taken prisoner and 1 missing. It ceased operations on December 11, 1918.

USAF Unit Histories
Created: 19 Feb 2021
Updated:

Sources

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