Thomas DeWitt Milling Collection - Early Flying Experiences by T. DeWitt Milling

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pioneers in aviation. Having seen one of Wilbur Wright's early exhibition flights, he left a position as president of a highly successful business to enter upon a career in the aviation industry that was to continue until his retirement in the thirties. His contribution to the growth of the industry was of inestimable value to both military and civilian aviation.

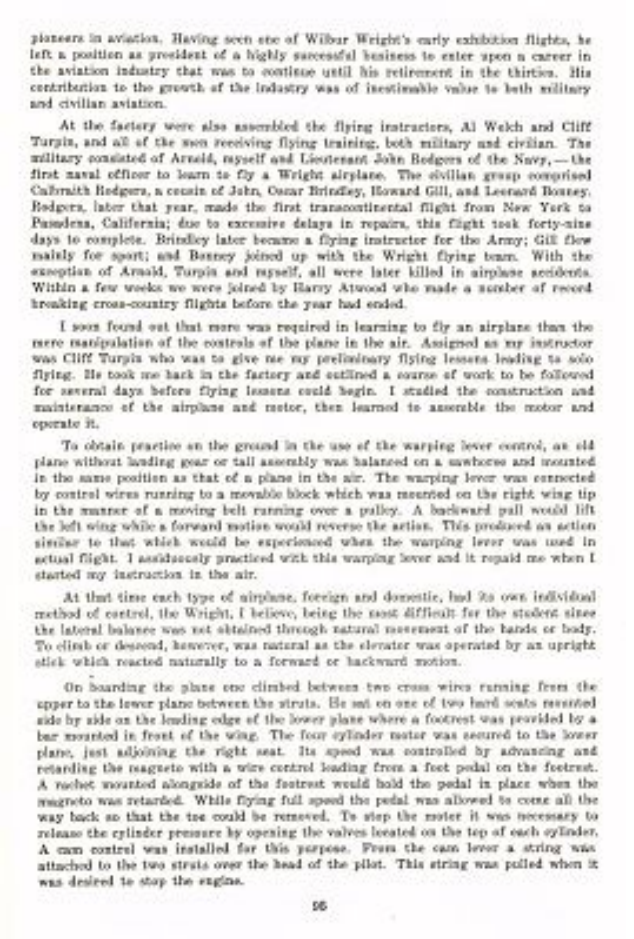
At the factory were also assembled the flying instructions, Al Welch and Cliff Turpin, and all of the men receiving flying training, both military and civilian. The military consisted of Arnold, myself and Lieutenant John Rodgers of the Navy,-the first naval officer to learn to fly a Wright airplane. The civilian group comprised Calbraith Rodgers, a cousin of John, Oscar Brindley, Howard Gill, and Leonard Bonney. Rodgers, later that year, made the first transcontinental flight from New York to Pasadena, California; due to excessive delays in repairs, this flight took forty-nine days to complete. Brindley later became a flying instructor for the Army; Gill flew mainly for sport; and Bonney joined up with the Wright flying team. With the exception of Arnold, Turpin and myself, all were later killed in airplane accidents. Within a few weeks we were joined by Harry Atwood who made a number of record breaking cross-country flights before the year had ended.

I soon found out that more was required in learning to fly an airplane than the mere manipulation of the controls of the plane in the air. Assigned as my instructor was Cliff Turpin who was to give me my preliminary flying lessons leading to solo flying. He took me back in the factory and outlined a course of work to be followed for several days before flying lessons could begin. I studied the construction and maintenance of the airplane and motor, then learned to assemble the motor and operate it.

To obtain practice on the ground in the use of the warping lever control, and old plane without landing gear or tail assembly was balanced on a sawhorse and mounted in the same position as that of a plane in the air. The warping lever was connected by control wires running to a movable block which was mounted on the right wing tip in the manner of a moving belt running over a pulley. A backward pull would lift the left wing while a forward motion would reverse the action. This produced an action similar to that which would be experienced when the warping lever was used in actual flight. I assiduously practiced with this warping lever and it repaid me when I started my instruction in the air.

At the time each type of airplane, foreign and domestic, had its own individual method of control, the Wright, I believe, being the most difficult for the student since the lateral balance was not obtained through natural movement of the hands or body. To climb or descend, however, was natural as the elevator was operated by an upright stick which reacted naturally to a forward or backward motion.

On boarding the plane one climbed between two cross wires running from the upper to the lower plane between the struts. He sat on one of two hard seats mounted side by side on the leading edge of the lower plane where a footrest was provided by a bar mounted in front of the wing. The four cylinder motor was secured to the lower plane, just adjoining the right seat. Its speed was controlled by advancing and retarding the magneto with a wire control leading from a foot pedal in place when the magneto was retarded. While flying full speed the pedal was allowed to come all the way back so that the toe could be removed. To stop the motor it was necessary to release the cylinder pressure by opening the valves located on the top of each cylinder. A cam control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