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## **Hattie Meyers Junkin Papers - Writings: "Let's Go to the Elmira Soaring Meet", US Air Service, 1931-08**

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On March 31, 1931, the Army Air Corps had a total of 1,608 airplanes, exclusive of experimental and obsolete and those awaiting condemnation. It must be emphasized that this number does not represent fighting planes, nor does it represent the true number of planes actually in service. Just as in the modern Navy it has been found necessary to maintain for each fighting ship certain auxiliary craft to keep these fighting ships in commission, so in the modern air force it is necessary to maintain for each fighting plane certain auxiliary planes to enable these fighting planes to fight. If the air force is to be a highly mobile striking force which, after all, is the only reason for its existence, then its spare parts and fuel and its ground crews as well must also travel at a high rate of speed—in other words, the entire air force must divorce itself from the ground and move in the air. In stating that the Air Corps, on March 31, 1931, had 1,608 planes, it must be remembered that it is the practice of other powers in enumerating the units of their air strength, to list only the number of fighting planes, whereas we not only include in our figures the fighting planes, but also the auxiliary and training planes, and the planes in the National Guard, together with aircraft of all types in depots undergoing repair. Consequently, figures representing air strength are often most misleading.

THE establishment of two bombardment wings, one on the East Coast and one on the West, an attack wing in the Central South and a pursuit group in Michigan, besides one observation in the East and another in Texas and the 19 National Guard observation squadrons attached to the various National Guard divisions, is regarded by the War Department heads as essential for defense purposes. To build these units up to the strength proposed in the program, they tell us, over 2,000 airplanes are needed. This proposed program provides only three combat squadrons in a group, whereas I am told tactical authorities insist that four combat squadrons are needed in each group. I do not pretend to be a military expert, but even this number appears to be small. The job of protecting our boundaries, which has been taken over entirely by the Army, is a big one. The Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific Coasts are 7,314 miles in length. The Canadian border is 3,986 miles long, and the Mexican, 2,013.

The first overt act of the next war in which we are involved, according to experts, will, in all probability, be an attempted invasion of United States territory by air from bases at sea or from land bases within striking distance. While improvements in ordnance have been made in recent years, we cannot rely upon anti-aircraft guns to ward off an air attack. The only adequate defense against aircraft is aircraft.

The Air Corps now finds itself in much the same position with regard to personnel as it does to equipment. The Air Corps Act provided that the allotted number of regular officers was to be increased by 403. Since the Air Corps at the time of the passage of the Act in 1926 did not have its allotted strength of 1,247 officers, but instead only 884 officers, it can be

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seen that the intent of the Act was really to provide for an increase in the Air Corps of 766 officers. It was believed that this number, combined with the number transferred from other branches of the service, would bring the office personnel up to the required 1,650 at the end of the five-year program. So far, the War Department has succeeded in obtaining only 200 of the officers allotted, although it will be remembered the Act stipulated that not more than one-fifth of the total increase in personnel and equipment was to be made the first year, and the remainder "in four approximately equal increments." Throughout the entire Air Corps on post, staff, and technical duties, junior officers are assigned to these duties and responsibilities far beyond their rank, due to the lack of officers of field grade in the Air Corps.

The transfer of officers from other branches of the service, War Department records show, has just about equalled the losses sustained by the Air Corps through resignations, retirements and deaths. In this connection it is interesting to note that while fatalities from accidents were reduced last year to the point where there was but one fatality for every 625,000 miles of flying, resignations have shown a decided increase as a result of the slow promotion that an Army officer may expect. Each Army aircraft squadron is supposed to be commanded by a major. Actually only five of the 53 squadrons are headed by majors. Captains are leading some of them; first lieutenants are in command of quite a number; and several are headed by second lieutenants.

It is apparent that the Air Corps is badly in need of the additional vacancies authorized. Two hundred and seventy-five students were graduated from the advanced flying school at Kelly Field last year. Of these, 72 were officers, 201 were flying cadets recruited from civil life, one was a non-commissioned officer and one a foreign officer. The graduate cadets have been commissioned in the reserve. Some of them are now on active duty with regular Air Corps units. The Assistant Secretary of War for Aeronautics would like to take many of these reserve officers and others graduated earlier from the flying school into the regular service, so the commissioned strength can be brought up to that contemplated by the five-year program, but his hands are tied.

Besides 1,650 regular officers, the Air Corps is supposed to have 550 Reserve officers on extended active duty upon the completion of the five-year plan. In the past two years, however, the War Department has not been able to order the authorized number of reserve to duty due to lack of funds. The ratio of the number of planes to the number of pilots authorized by the Air Corps Act is out of balance, and the present shortage of equipment has made it even more pronounced. Even though Congress were to appropriate funds for the purchase of 2,058 planes, the Air Corps still would not have enough equipment for 2,200 officers, and could thus not throw the full strength into battle. However, the shortage of personnel would be no argument for reducing equipment, since the additional equipment furnishes reserve

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