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## **Harold E. Morehouse Flying Pioneers Biographies Collection - Bocquel, Joe**

Extracted on Apr-17-2024 06:59:38

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## JOE BOCQUEL

## Pioneer French-American Exhibition Aviator

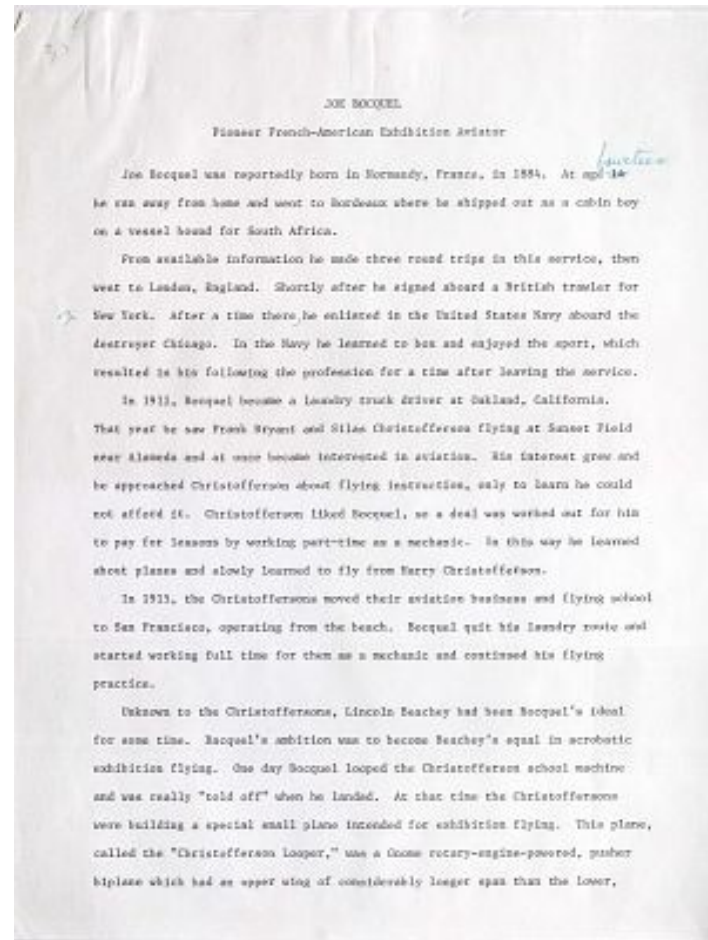
Joe Bocquel was reportedly born in Normandy, France, in 1884. At age fourteen he ran away from home and went to Bordeaux where he shipped out as a cabin boy on a vessel bound for South Africa.

From available information he made three round trips in this service, then went to London, England. Shortly after he signed aboard a British trawler for New York. After a time there, he enlisted in the United States Navy aboard the destroyer Chicago. In the Navy he learned to box and enjoyed the sport, which resulted in his following the profession for a time after leaving the service.

In 1911, Bocquel became a laundry truck driver at Oakland, California. That year he saw Frank Bryant and Silas Christofferson flying at Sunset Field near Alameda and at once became interested in aviation. His interest grew and he approached Christofferson about flying instruction, only to learn he could not afford it. Christofferson liked Bocquel, so a deal was worked out for him to pay for lessons by working part-time as a mechanic. In this way he learned about planes and slowly learned to fly from Harry Christofferson.

In 1915, the Christoffersons moved their aviation business and flying school to San Francisco, operating from the beach. Bocquel quit his laundry route and started working full time for them as a mechanic and continued his flying practice.

Unknown to the Christoffersons, Lincoln Beachey had been Bocquel's ideal for some time. Bocquel's ambition was to become Beachey's equal in acrobatic exhibition flying. One day Bocquel looped the Christofferson school machine and was really "told off" when he landed. At that time the Christoffersons were building a special small plane intended for exhibition flying. This plane, called the "Christofferson Looper," was a Gnome rotary-engine-powered, pusher biplane which had an upper wing of considerably longer span than the lower,



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