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Harold E. Morehouse Flying Pioneers Biographies Collection - Wildman, Francis A. "Doc"

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On August 12th, 1914 Wildman obtained Hydro Flying License No. 22 at Hammondsport on a Curtiss Flying Boat. Following this he went to California to start the first late fall and early winter class at North Island. The first new Model "J" Tractor was there and Wildman aided in the initial flight tests. Later that month he also did some flying of Curtiss entries in the U. S. Army Signal Corps aeroplane competition. Over the winter months of 1914-1915 Wildman's classes were comprised principally of military officers, and the Curtiss North Island School was rapidly becoming the government's leading flight training center.

Wildman remained at North Island in the spring of 1915 and continued the training of military men and doing test work. On June 12th the House Appropriations Committee paid a visit to North Island and each member was taken for a Flying Boat ride by Wildman. He remained at North Island until the Curtiss Company closed the base and the government took it over as a Signal Corps Aviation School. At that time Wildman stayed on and was Chief Instructor in the government service for about four and one-half years. Under government ownership the North Island flying facilities became known as Rockwell Field.

Very extensive military training operations were carried on there during the war and some twelve to fifteen instructors were kept busy training students. In January, 1917 Lt. Col. Bishop and Lt. Robertson became lost in the air over the mountains east of San Diego, and finally crash-landed in the Sonora Desert in Mexico. Wildman and Brindley led serial search operations from Rockwell Field to find them but after much very rough flying gave up, having found no trace of the missing flyers who finally, in bad conditions, reached help themselves.

After the war Wildman remained at Rockwell Field for a time and when the Army decided to discontinue the services of the last of their civilian instructors he was offered a commission as Major if he would continue in the Army. Wildman decided against this as he had established residence in San Diego, own-

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