



Mechanic at work on Curtiss P6-E of the 17th Pursuit Squadron Selfridge Field, Michigan (file photo)

the Air Service won two great aerial speed records, the Pulitzer Trophy and the Schneider Award. On October 12, Lt "Cy" Bettis flying a Curtiss R302 racer, won the Pulitzer Trophy with an average speed of 249 mile per hour. Two weeks later, Lt "Jimmy" Doolittle used the same plane equipped with pontoons to win the international Schneider race, averaging over 232 miles per hour. Not satisfied, Doolittle flew again the following day, this time averaging 245 miles per hour, a new world record for seaplanes.



Jimmy Doolittle standing beside a Curtiss Hawk Pursuit

An act of July 2, 1926 created the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps, thereby eliminating the designation Air Service. General Mason M Patrick was named the first Chief of the Air Corps.

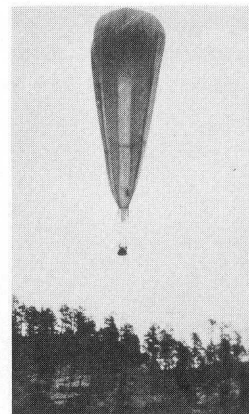
A good will mission to South and Central America was dispatched by the Air Corps from Kelly Field on December 21, 1926. The mission consisting of five two-place Loenig amphibians, toured over 22,000 of the lower Americas, returning to Bolling Field, Washington D C, on May 2, 1927, with the exception of one plane, piloted by Captain Clinton F Woolsey and Lt John W Benton, who were killed at Buenos Aires in a mid air collision with the lead plane, piloted by Major Herbert A Dargue and Lt Ennis C Whitehead. Major Dargue and Lt Whitehead were able to parachute to safety.

A month after the return of the good will mission in 1927, two Air Service-flyers completed the first not stop flight from the continental U S to Hawaii, aided by a radio beam. Lt Lester J Maitland, the pilot and Lt Albert F Hegenberger, navigator, flew a tri motor Fokker from Oakland, California to Wheeler Field, Honolulu in 25 hours and 50 minutes. The flight completed on June 29, 1927 covered over 2400 miles.

On January 1, 1929, Major Carl Spaatz and Captain Ira C Eaker destined to become commanding general and deputy commanding general, respectively, of the Army Air Forces, took part in the memorable flight of the "Question Mark," a trimotor Fokker which set an endurance record that dwarfed the earlier achievement of Smith and Richter. Taking off from Los Angeles on New Year's day, the "Question Mark" stayed aloft almost 151 hour and flew over 11,000 miles by means of mid air refueling. On January 7 the plane was forced to land when one engine cut out. Forty tons of material, including 5660 gallons of gasoline, had been transferred in 43 contacts with the re-supply ship, another Fokker.

The Air Corps' "West Point of the Air," Randolph Field, Texas was dedicated on June 20, 1930, although construction was not complete at the time. At the time of its dedication, Randolph consisted of 162 officers and 1432 enlisted men. It became the headquarters of the Air Corps training center, and in addition became the site of the primary and basic flying schools the following year, on October 25, 1931.

The early thirties produced the important developments in aircraft design. One was the new monoplane design, the other the growing use of all metal construction. In 1931 Boeing brought out the Air Corps' first all metal bomber, the B-9. The B-9 was a mid wing monoplane with retractable landing gear, powered by two 600 horsepower Pratt & Whitney engines. It was capable of 1888 miles per hour. Also in 1931, the Curtiss company introduced the A-8, an all metal attack monoplane.



An early Balloon Ascent (Unkn)

The following year the Martin company delivered to the Air Corps the B-10, a twin engine, all metal monoplane. The B-10, capable of a speed of over 200 miles per hour, was at that time the fastest and heaviest bomber in the world. A modified version of this plane was known as the B-12, a plane which was faster than some of the pursuit types of that day.