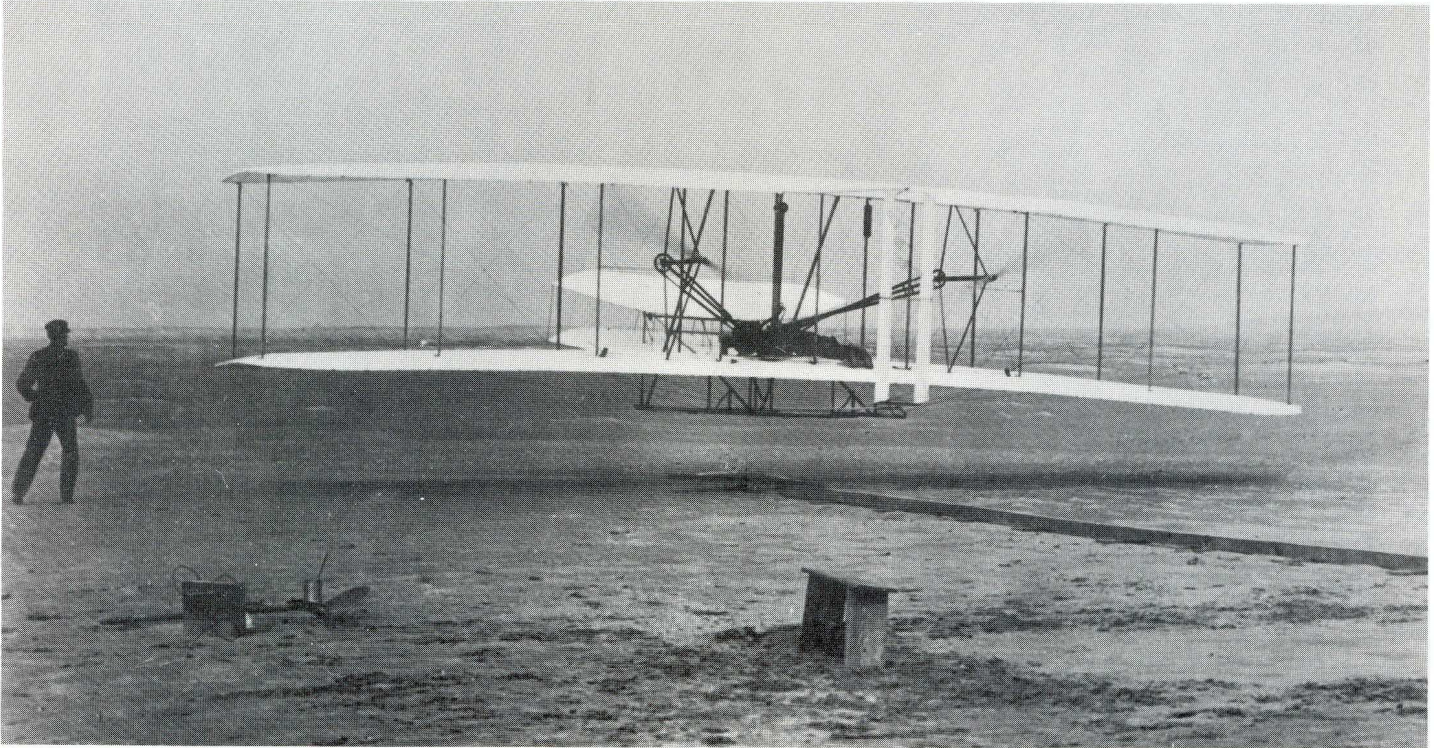


# HISTORY OF THE "ARMY AIR FORCES" 1907 to 1947



December 1903 First Wright Brothers flight (AF via UAL)

## INTRODUCTION

*The Army Air Forces, its immediate predecessor, the Air Corps, US Army, under which most of us served, ceased to exist on September 18, 1947. On that day the United States Air Force was created. This short history deals only with, the Air Service, Air Corps, and the Army Air Forces when they were a part of the United States Army. It reflects the thinking of the author, (who is unknown) during the 1947-1950 period when this report was probably prepared. The mimeographed manuscript of which we have a copy was shown to be the property of Lt/Col H W Farrell. If per chance Col Farrell should see this issue of the Torretta Flyer and could shed light on the name of the author, we would be most pleased to give him or her proper credit for the article. Member Adolph Marcus 824 sq. found the manuscript while researching the history of Mitchell Field, NY, and forwarded it to us as part of the Airbase History Project. This is a historical document presented exactly as we found it with only minor grammar and spelling corrections.*

On August 1, 1907, an Aeronautical Division was established under the supervision of the Chief Signal Officer, Signal Corps, United States Army. This division was to have charge of all matters pertaining to military ballooning, air machines, and all kindred subjects. Captain Charles Chandler was placed in command.

But long before the War Department had acknowledged aeronautics as a military potentiality, the US Army had been active in aerial work. As far back as the Civil War, when observations were made from balloons for the Army of the Potomac, far seeing officers realized the possibilities of aerial warfare. In 1898 an Army Observation balloon directed artillery fire during the attack on San Juan Hill, Cuba. In 1906 an Army balloonist won the first international balloon race. Later, the Army Signal School at Fort Leavenworth set up a course in ballooning for its student officers. Until 1907 however, the only work in military aeronautics had been with free and captive balloons. Except for the Wright Brothers, whose claims had met with a good deal of skepticism on the part of the American public, no other heavier-than-air craft had ever flown which could be called practical from a military point of view.

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Even after the founding of the Aeronautical Division, the balloon was still considered the prime medium of military aeronautics. In 1908 a contract was awarded to Captain Thomas S Baldwin for the development of a dirigible balloon. Specifications called for a speed of 20 miles per hour and endurance of 2 hours. In its trial that summer, Baldwin's airship averaged 19.61 miles per hour and stayed aloft the required two hours. The dirigible cost \$6750 less a 15% penalty for Baldwin's failure to meet the speed requirements by 39/100 of a mile.