

CMH NEWSLETTER

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50th Aero Squadron

GROUP
INSIGNIA

(The following is taken from an original typed manuscript in the possession of member Richard Moore. Mr. Moore's father, Thomas P. Moore, served in the 50th Aero Squadron. This article was originally published in the May 1931 issue of "Popular Aviation" magazine. Ed. note.)

THE RESCUE OF THE LOST BATTALION

An Epic of the War

by

James M. Richardson

Lieut., 1st Squadron; Holder of Distinguished Service Cross

There was no hint of the impending tragic events that were to befall him when on October 2, 1918, Major Charles W. Whittlesey of the 77th Division, A. E. F., received this laconic order:

"The advance will be resumed on D'day at H' hour. Your objective is the line 294.5-276.6. You will take your objective and hold it at any cost until support arrives."

Word of the impending attack spread rapidly through the ranks of the 77th Division. In an undemonstrative manner they prepared to go over the top. What was another attack to men who had been through seven days of the bitterest fighting of the war! Who had struggled desperately for every inch of ground they had gained!

The 77th Division had the tortuous wilderness of the Argonne Forest itself-- one of the toughest sectors ever given any body of troops. No terrain could be better adapted to resistance, and the Germans had taken full advantage of it. Their carefully concealed machine gun nests made progress for the Americans a matter of overwhelming numbers rather than of artillery or strategy.

Following a short but intense barrage the first wave of the 77th crept forward shortly after noon. On every foot of the line they encountered a deluge of machine gun fire. Again and again they launched savage thrusts only to meet enemy resistance that checked them.

But at one place the Americans finally crashed through. They broke the defense in the sector of the 308th Infantry, and units of that regiment with a part of the 306th Machine Gun Battalion penetrated the German lines by advancing up a small valley. At sundown this small force reached the Binerville-Apremont highway and established themselves below the road on the northern slope of a bleak ravine.

Late that evening a single company of the 307th Infantry fought its way forward and joined them. Soon thereafter it was discovered that both flanks were exposed! The troops on each side had failed to advance!

But Whittlesey's orders were to hold his objective at any cost, and hold it he did while the German army pushed troops in behind and cut him and his men off from the main body of the 77th Division.

By noon of October 3 this small group of men, known as the Lost Battalion, was completely surrounded. Behind the little force, entrenched on the other side of the ravine, was a powerful German detachment.

There were two machine gun nests on each side of the Americans and to the rear. There was another machine gun on an eminence to the right. The main German army with flame throwers and trench mortars lay on the heights above them.

Thus surrounded and cut off from the main body of American troops, this courageous little band of fighters lay trapped but defiant and ready to hold out to the last man.

The fight of the Lost Battalion is one of the most heroic in American military annals. It is reminiscent of the Alamo and of Custer's last stand. The Americans were subjected to constant machine gun and minenwerfer fire. They had to beat off numerous attacks. But for five days they stuck it out more than a mile ahead of the division front lines.

The men had no blankets, insufficient ammunition and no food after the second day. Such water as they got came from muddy Charlevaux creek, exposed to deadly machine gun fire.

The position occupied by the Lost Battalion was a narrow strip of ground about 350 yards long and less than 50 yards wide. It lay on an east and west line on the north side of the ravine.

But Major Whittlesey unfortunately had difficulty in orienting himself exactly, and in all the messages sent back by carrier pigeon, he gave his location inaccurately. According to the co-ordinates he used, his position should have been slightly behind and to one side of what it actually was.

The 50th Observation Squadron, stationed at Remicourt, was attached to the 77th Division for the early part of the Argonne drive. On the day it became definitely known that Whittlesey's battalion was cut off and surrounded, the squadron sent four courier planes to drop messages at the point where the beleaguered infantry were supposed to be.

On this and the following day, October 5, a generous supply of chocolate and cigarettes was dumped with every message. Though the airmen were unaware of it at the time, everything that was dropped fell into the German's hands. This was the direct result of having inaccurate information as to the battalion's true position, but certainly it was nothing like so terrible as what came later.

American artillery, guided by the same inaccurate coordinates, began to shell what they believed to be the German positions but actually their shells fell on the surrounded men! At 4:15 p.m. on October 5 Whittlesey sent a message to the rear by his last courier pigeon. It read:

To: C.O. 308th Infantry.

From: 1st Br., 308th Infantry.

We are along the road parallel 276.4. Our artillery is dropping a barrage directly on us. For heaven's sake stop it.

(Signed) Whittlesey, Major 308th

This message drove the division to redouble their efforts to rescue the Lost Battalion. They attacked furiously just before dark but were repulsed by the Germans along the entire front.

At the 77th Division headquarters a few hours later the officers decided to ask for planes of the 50th Squadron to drop food, ammunition, and medical supplies to the surrounded men. And it was from this point that the air service really began to play a prominent part in the relief of the Lost Battalion.

In that bloody angle of the Argonne Forest near Charlevaux Mill airmen wrote one of the brightest pages in air service history. That the results they produced were not more tangible is surely no reflection on their colossal courage and their glorious enthusiasm.

October 6 is a day that few of us stationed at Remicourt will ever forget. To begin with the weather was miserable. A damp mist swirled in from the north and covered the field like a drab blanket. Both airmen and mechanics were tense with excitement.

Though little was said of the terrible plight of the Lost Battalion, still it was in everybody's thoughts. To think of five or six hundred men cut off for over three days without food or ammunition, with their condition growing worse

hourly! We conjured some dreadful pictures of their suffering, but certainly none were as bad as reality!

At the airdrome mechanics had worked faithfully throughout the night to have every plane in the best condition. Others had wrapped food, ammunition, and medical supplies into convenient bundles. They had attached small parachutes to the carrier pigeon baskets to "insure a fairly soft landing for the imprisoned birds." Those charged with doing the flying were full of determination. Anxious to be off, now that day had come, they strode restlessly about the flying field.

One of the first planes to leave was flown by Lieutenant Harold Goettler. His observer was Lieutenant Erwin Bleckley. Their De Havilland looked like a lean grey ~~phant~~ as it roared off the field and turned north into the devouring mist.

In a few minutes Goettler and Bleckley watched Saint-Mensould slide back beneath their wings. With the Argonne Forest on their right, they headed for Vienne-le-Chateau. As they flew nearer and nearer their objective, they could see flashes below like dull points of flame--the artillery.

Over Binarville Goettler turned northeast and sped directly across the lines toward Charlevaux Mill. On the side of the ravine, 400 yards east of Charlevaux Mill, lay the Lost Battalion.

Goettler was an experienced pilot. He had flown over the 77th division daily and knew the terrain thoroughly. He realized immediately that he and Bleckley would never be able to find their objective from 1,000 feet. At this particular point the Argonne was shrouded in the interminable fog and mist. From the airmen's height objects on the ground were effectively hidden as they would have been by darkness.

"No use wasting time at this altitude. We have to get down lower if we're going to spot them," shouted Goettler through the speaking tube to Bleckley.

Bleckley nodded. Goettler slowed down the motor. The D.H.-4 sank rapidly through the mist--500 feet--400 feet--300 feet-- then barely 200. suddenly the American plane darted out of the protective gray fog. Immediately a storm of rifle and machine gun fire met it. Goettler could hear the spiteful crackle even after he opened the powerful Liberty motor on full.

The airmen were down in the ravine now. The German troops on the heights north of the Lost Battalion were actually higher than the plane! The Americans raced over Charlevaux Mill peering below for any trace of the lost men,

The trees beneath them and on each side they could see plainly now, for this wasn't the blasted region that the Argonne was further south. The woods here had suffered little from artillery fire, and they offered perfect protection to soldiers on the ground.

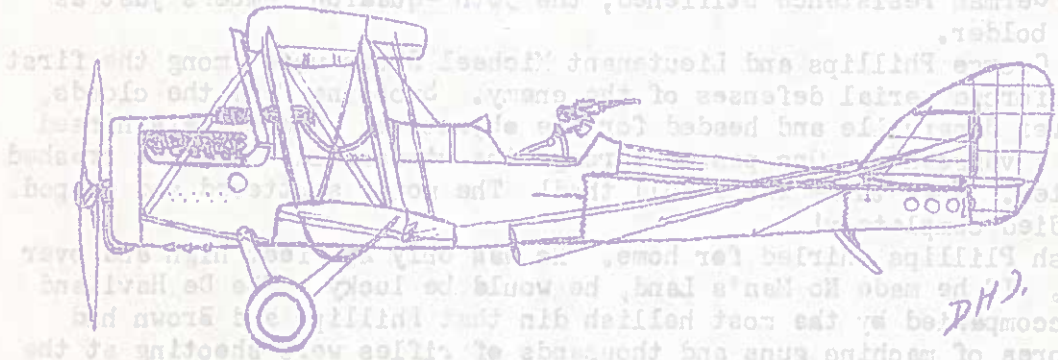
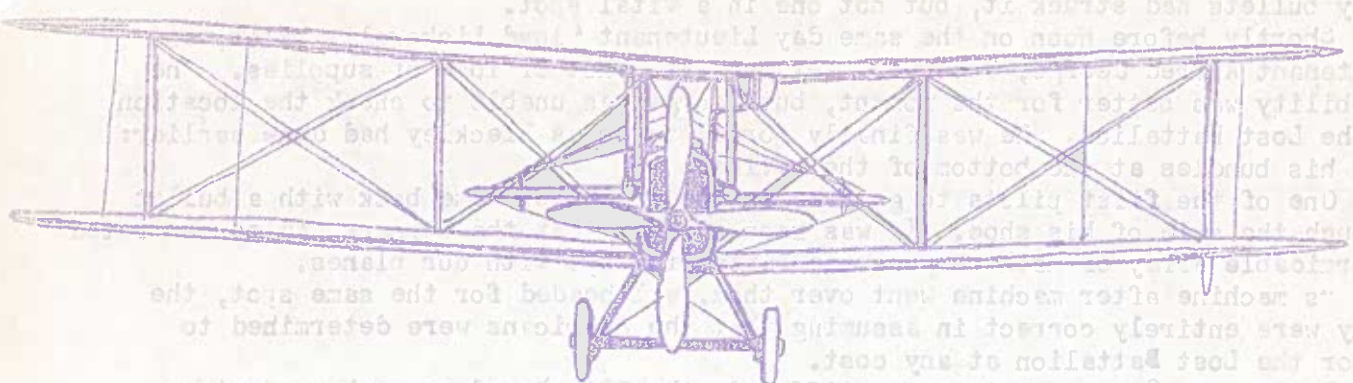
The machine gun fire and rifle fire grew in volume. Bullets whined by the airmen's ears. Bleckley grabbed his own machine guns. He stared over the side of the cockpit. If only he could spot one of those Germans--. Or, better still, if only he could spot the Lost Battalion.

Twice he shot his Very pistol in the hope that Whittlesey's men would get his rocket signal and show a panel. They didn't show one, or themselves either. Any movement on their part meant sudden death from snipers.

For the third time the plane flashed through the ravine. The enemy fire was growing more terrible each second. A bullet splintered a strut by Goettler's head. Another hit Bleckley's guns and ricocheted into space. Now one tore through the fuselage ahead of Goettler and took a section of fabric with it.

Under the trajectory of the shells! On top of the machine guns! Only those who have threaded their way among those weapons of death can know what anxious seats Goettler and Bleckley had. Or can appreciate their courage.

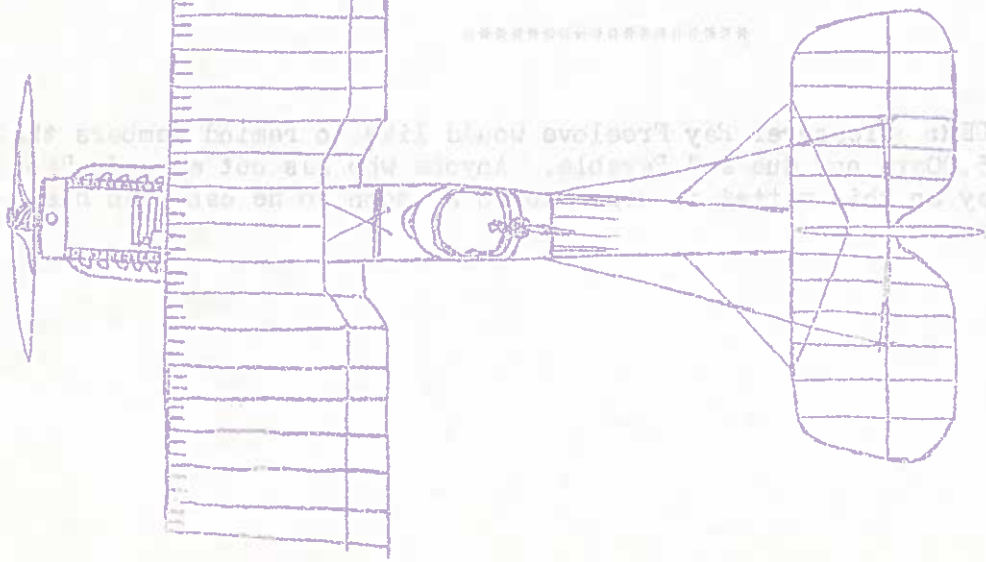
On this round Bleckley realized that he must act now. He held his bundles over the side. He watched the ravine unfold beneath him. Yes, there was the spot where the Lost Battalion was supposed to be. And nobody had learned anything to



D.H. 4



DE HAVILLAND
D.H. 4
MOUNT OF THE
50th AERO SQUAD.



TO BE COMPLETED

the contrary. He dropped the bundles as Goettler turned the DH and headed for home. Back at Remicourt we marvelled at the condition of Goettlers plane. Over forty bullets had struck it, but not one in a vital spot.

Shortly before noon on the same day Lieutenant Lloyd Fickerell, pilot, and Lieutenant Alfred George, Observer, set out with another load of supplies. The visibility was better for the moment, but George was unable to check the location of the Lost Battalion. He was finally forced to do as Bleckley had done earlier: drop his bundles at the bottom of the ravine.

One of the first pilots to go over in the afternoon came back with a bullet through the sole of his shoe. It was soon evident that the Germans had concentrated a formidable array of machine guns and rifles to cope with our planes.

As machine after machine went over them, all headed for the same spot, the enemy were entirely correct in assuming that the Americans were determined to succor the Lost Battalion at any cost.

But as the German resistance stiffened, the 50th Squadron members just as promptly became bolder.

Lieutenant George Phillips and Lieutenant Michael Brown were among the first to dare the reinforced aerial defenses of the enemy. Swooping from the clouds, they swept in over Binarville and headed for the objective. The bullets hissed about them with a vengeance. One passed through the windshield. Another crashed into the altimeter. Then there was a dull thud! The motor stuttered and gasped. In a moment it died completely!

Like a flash Phillips whirled for home. He was only 250 feet high and over the enemy lines. If he made No Man's Land, he would be lucky. The De Haviland sank rapidly, accompanied by the most hellish din that Phillips and Brown had ever heard. Scores of machine guns and thousands of rifles were shooting at the luckless pair.

Phillips held the nose of his plane up as long as he dared. It barely cleared a barbed wire entanglement. The nose went down. The ship settled fast. It hit, bounced, and ended in a shell hole. In a rain of bullets the two Americans leaped out and reached our lines.

Scarcely an hour later Lieutenant Allen Bird and Lieutenant William Bolt were caught in another destructive wave of enemy fire from the same source. Bird skidded his plane, he changed directions, but to no avail. The Germans shot his machine out of commission, and he crashed near Vienne-le-Chateau. Fortunately neither he nor Bolt were hurt.

Back at Remicourt we were alarmed. Two machines had failed to return. Having no news from the occupants of the machines, we feared they had been killed.

TO BE CONCLUDED

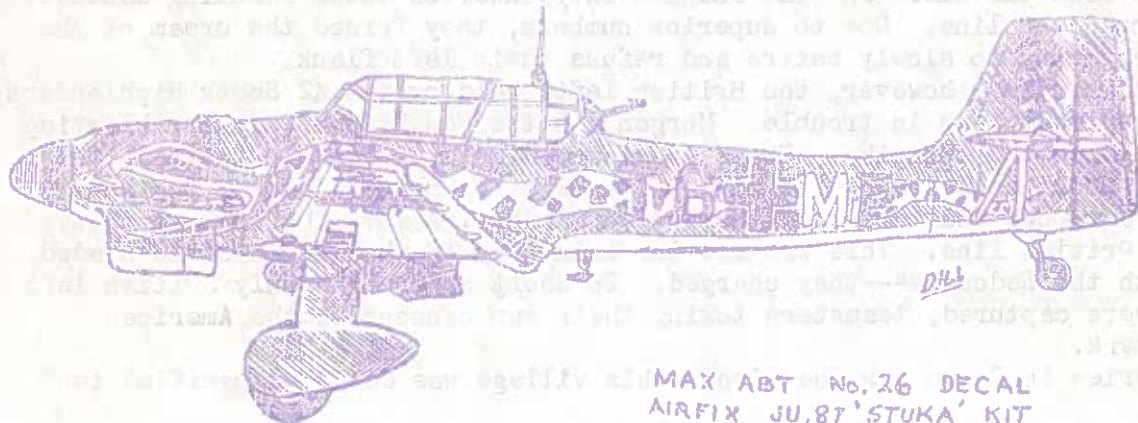
A FRIENDLY REMINDER: Treasurer Ray Freelove would like to remind members that their annual dues of \$5.00 are now due and payable. Anyone who has not already "gotten together" with Ray on this matter is urged to do so soon so he can plan his budget for the year.

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A WARGAME REPORT

by
Richard Moore

American--Dick (the Benevolent) Moore
British--Dan (the Butcher) Jones

The battle for Hill 875 opened when an American Cavalry unit collided with a similar British force just east of the village of Dakto, in the central highlands of New Jersey, December 1781. Outnumbered, the U.S. Cavalry formed a defensive perimeter but were driven from the field by a spirited British attack. Morgan's riflemen, at the time moving up to support the horse, were forced on the defensive. A similar charge by the British cavalry against more crack shots, however, decimated the Redcoats badly and the remnants retreated toward their main body on the plank road.

The U.S. Continental line simultaneously had advanced up to the turnpike and formed a line of battle parallel to the old post road with the thought of turning the British right flank, while the 2nd New Hampshire regiment was detached to support Morgan on the right. The battle was joined. The British skillfully deployed to meet the American line and not only thwarted their flanking maneuver but overlapped the line. Due to superior numbers, they forced the cream of the American regiments to slowly retire and refuse their left flank.

In the meantime, however, the British left, held by the 42 Scots Highlanders 2nd light regiment, was in trouble. Morgan and the New Hampshires were blasting away from across the turnpike. These Americans didn't withdraw. Instead, they hurdled the stone wall and closed with bayonets. The British broke, the New Hampshires advanced and threw a withering enfilade fire into the up till then victorious British line. This was all the main body of the Continentals needed. To Hell with the Redcoats--they charged. In short order, the only British left on the field were captured, teamsters towing their own cannons to the American artillery park.

The Tories in Dakto saw the light--this village was declared pacified two days later.

NOTE: Do not place any credence on the atrocity stories spread by the British. They are, at best, baseless falsehoods.

Dick (the Benevolent) Moore

Sunday, January 7, 1968, should go down as a very happy day for CWH. The club was featured on the KOA Channel 4 News show "Scope". They showed films of a war game a few weeks prior in which several members participated. Members playing in the game were Dick Moore and Ed Meyers (Americans) versus Dan Jones and Tom Herman (British). Films showed members setting up the miniatures, many shots of the soldiers themselves, and the game in progress. Also good closeups of some 54mm figures owned by Ray Freelove were shown. The station and its staff are to be complimented for a very fine job in film editing and narration in putting the program together. Special thanks go to Bob Palmer and Jerry Curran for their interest in the club.

LIBRARIAN'S CORNER

by
Charles Williams

Our library is now installed at The Fort. It is in a bookcase just to the left of the entrance as you go into the Fort library. The books are on the top shelf. Our pamphlets, tech manuals, and assorted papers are in a file cabinet beside the bookcase.

The check-out procedure is the same as it is in most libraries. 1) Print your name on the borrower's card. 2) Date it with the day you take it out. 3) Add 30 days to that date and put it on the date due slip. 4) Put the borrower's card into the index card box. 5) When you bring the book back, put the borrower's card back into the Pocket.

Just what is in the library? For your reference, here are the books in our library:

GENERAL

America, Its History and People, by Faulkner and Kepner
The Fighting Americans, by Van Wyck Mason

NAPOLEONIC WARS

The Blockade of Phalsburg, by Erchmann-Chatrian
The Invasion of France in 1814, by Erchmann-Chatrian
Waterloo, by Erchmann-Chatrian

REVOLUTION

A Short History of the American Revolution, by Preston

CIVIL WAR

Soldier Life, edited by Stern
The Red Badge of Courage, by Crane

INDIAN WARS

Indian Wars of the U.S. Army (1776-1865), by Downey

WORLD WAR I

Old Soldiers Never Die, by Richards
The Ignorant Armies, by Halliday

WORLD WAR II-PACIFIC

The Battle for Guadalcanal, by Griffith
But Not in Shame, by Toland
Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo, by Lawson
Fig Boats, by Roscoe

WORLD WAR II-NAVAL

The Cruel Sea, by Monserrat
Most Dangerous Sea, by Lott
Pictorial History of the Second World War-Vol.6. Your Navy in Action
The Russian Convoys, by Schofield
Tin Cans, by Roscoe

WORLD WAR II-EUROPE

Churchill, taken from the diaries of Lord Moran
Night Drop, by Marshall
Of Spies and Strategems, by Lovell
Panzer Leader, by Guderian
Pictorial History of the Second World War-Vols. 3, 4, and 5

WORLD WAR II-AIR

Black Thursday, by Caidin
The First and the Last, by Galland

New Books-- This month's new books are the gift of Van Jones and we appreciate them. Thank you, Dan!

WORLD WAR II-NAVAL

Submarine!, by Commander Edward Beach, U.S.N. This is the classic submarine story from WW II

U-Boat 977, by Heinz Schaeffe. A German U-boat commander's account of the battle of the Atlantic.

The Sea Wolves, by Wolfgang Frank. Comprehensive coverage of German u-boats in WW II.

Defeat at Sea, by G.D. Bekker. The destruction of the German Navy during WWII.

WORLD WAR II-AIR

Wing Leader, by J.E. Johnson. The story of the top allied ace during the last war.

Target: Germany, by the Eighth Air Force. The official story of the 8th Bomber Command's first year over Europe. (Very well done)

WORLD WAR II-EUROPE

We Die Alone, by David Howarth. A magnificent story of great courage.

Rommel, the Desert Fox, by Desmond Young. The story of a great leader through British eyes.

That's all for this month. All contributions will be gratefully accepted. One last word-- a library is useful only as long as it's used.

BOOK REVIEW

BY

Van Jones

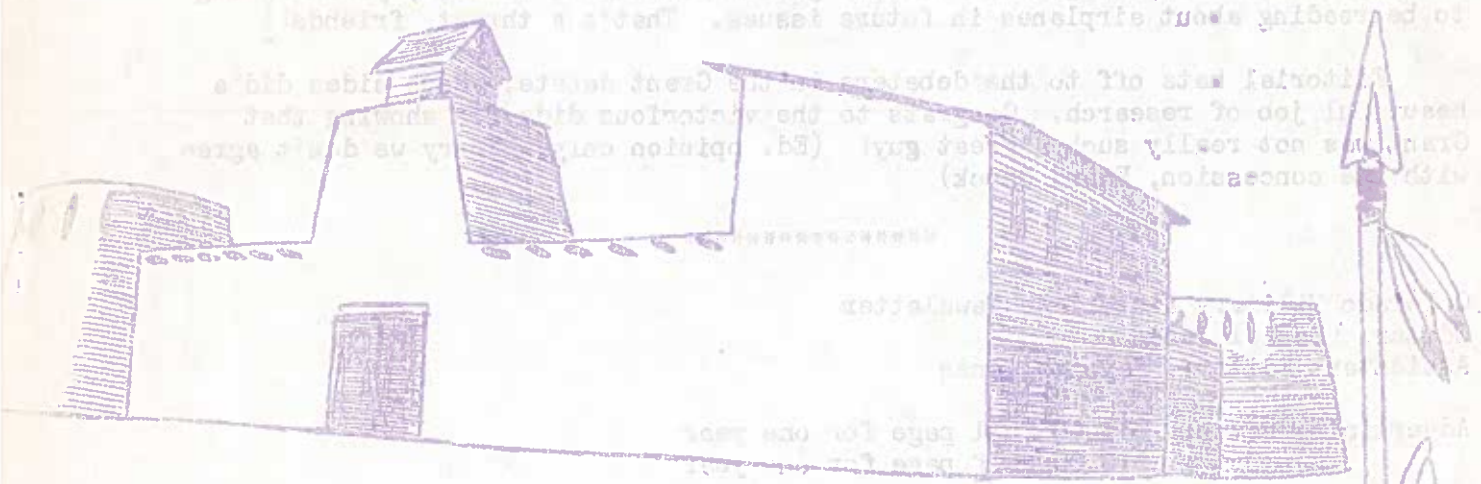
"Armor Profiles Nos. 1-6"

Profile Publications Ltd., the company and its products, have long been familiar references for those of us with interests in the field of aviation history. These booklets represent, with 2 to 4 pages of color and excellent photos and text, one of the best values (even after the price increase to 50¢) on the market today. The aviation series was and is a fantastic financial success throughout the world and it was only natural that the publishers should start looking for other subjects upon which to apply their system. Car profiles were first, and now their newest series, armored vehicles. As anyone interested in history and development of armored vehicles knows, there are very few books available in this country dealing with this subject, and of the 4 or 5 available, none have an adequate selection of illustrations for the period the authors are attempting to cover. In addition, there is not one magazine (available on a newsstand) which caters to this subject. However, the frustration of lack of material is over. Profiles have released numbers 1-6 which are available at better hobby shops, and have announced 72 numbers for future publication.

They follow the same basic format as earlier plane and car types with one exception. In car and aircraft profiles the inner leaf of the cover contained a three-view and back leaf side-views of variations of the basic types. Armor profiles have abandoned this in favor of a two page center spread 5-view drawing of the basic types with no drawing of variants. Otherwise, they follow usual profile practice with numerous photos, technical information, and an excellent text.

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HISTORIAN'S SCUTTLEBUTT

For our February program, we are honored to have as our guest speaker Colonel Wendell Fertig, who will speaking on the subject of guerilla warfare. Col. Fertig is the principle character in the book We Fought Alone, by John keats, which was reviewed in this publication. We would urge all members who have not read this excellent book to make an effort to obtain a copy (its in paperback) and read it by the February meeting, if possible. If you can't obtain a copy, perhaps some of the members who have this book would be willing to loan you their copy.

On December 22, 1967, the second annual CMH Christmas party was held in the home of President Austin Moore. If the success of this gathering is any indication, this will most likely remain a yearly tradition. About 35 people (members and Guests) were in attendance for a great evening of food, drink and gift exchange. Good times were had by all!! Many thanks to our gracious hosts, Austin and Meg.

We would like to urge any members who have material for the newsletter to submit same as soon as possible. We need book reports, feature articles, etc. In other words---anything!!! If we dont get some material in here, you're going to be reading about airplanes in future issues. That's a threat, friends!!

Editorial hats off to the debaters in the Grant debate. Both sides did a beautiful job of research. Congrats to the victorious side for showing that Grant was not reelly such a great guy! (Ed. opinion only. Sorry we don't agree with the concession, Ed and Chuck)

Colorado Military Historians Newsletter

Editor: Daniel Jones

Assistant Editor: Fayette Jones

Advertising rates: \$15.00 full page for one year
\$10.00 half page for one year

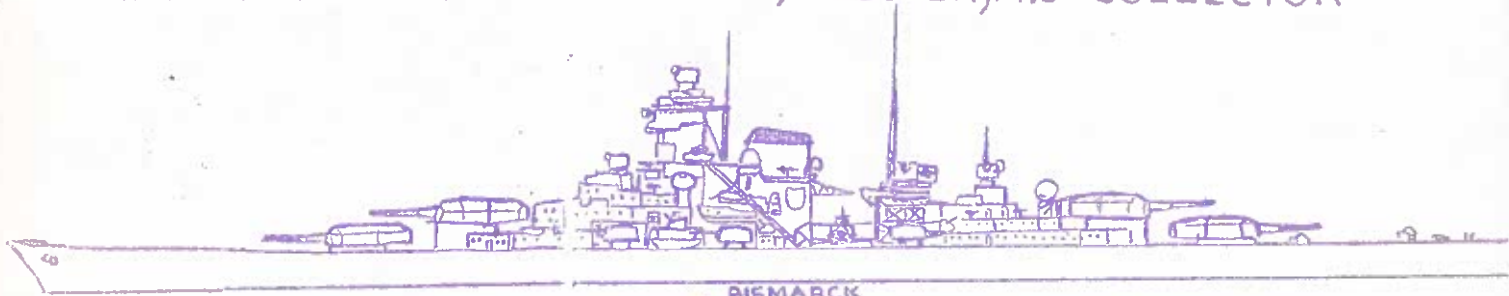
Mailing address; 204 Leona Drive
Denver, Colorado 80221

In case anyone is interested, we have lots of official stationary yet. If you want to contact potential members, other clubs, etc., and would like to use the stationary, contact Danor Faye Jones and get some. We paid for it, fellows, so we better use it!

CHALLENGE!! On Saturday, February 3, 1968, anyone wishing to test his skill against the old master of tactical warfare is invited to be at the home of Dan Jones 204 Leona Drive at 1500 hours. For further information, contact the Fuehrer at 429-7942.

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