

96TH AERO SQUADRON

Its Creation and Activities Before the Beginning of the St. Mihiel Operations, August 10, 1918.

When the 96th Aero Squadron was formed at Kelly Field, San Antonio, Texas, August 20, 1917, it was just like all other infant organizations of the rapidly growing army; it had no definite conception of what lay in store, whether it would be among the fortunate units to be sent across the water for immediate service in the field, or whether it would be retained for equally important but less stirring duties at some home flying field. Not one of the successive Commanding Officers, not any of the enlisted men, who had come in a body to Fort Slocum, could have prophesied the particular work laid out for the Squadron in the war, the coveted honor of being the first Squadron of the American Air Service to carry bombs over the lines, and for months the only Squadron in active operations against the enemy.

During its stay at Kelly Field, the Squadron was thoroughly drilled every day, and given considerable fatigue duty to harden the men. The organization was threatened with complete disruption by a severe attack of ptomaine poisoning, which put half of the personnel in the Hospital, but which did not result in any deaths. On October 9th, the Squadron, commanded by Captain George C. Thomas Jr., A.S., U.S.A., was ordered to the Aviation Concentration and Supply Depot at Mineola, N.Y., to be outfitted for overseas duty.

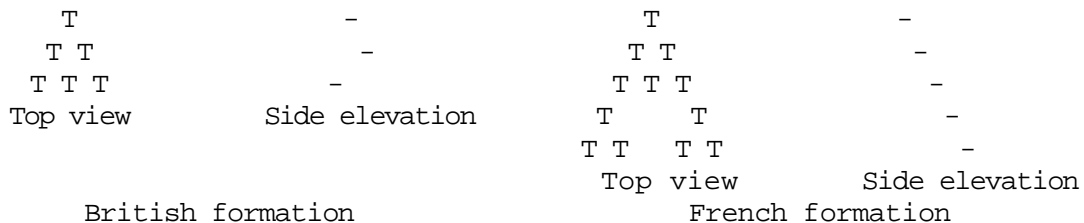
The voyage was made on the R.M.S.S. "Adriatic", leaving Pier 61, New York, October 27th, and arriving in Liverpool, November 10th. The Squadron was then ordered to southern England for six months training but upon arriving in Southampton, a change in orders caused immediate departure for France, where the Squadron was stationed at the 7th Aviation, Instruction Center, Clermont-Ferrand, Put-de-Dome.

As a pioneer Squadron in the new school of bombardment instruction, the 96th was given complete control of the hangars, transportation and armament, and assisted in organizing the systems of management still in force. The mechanics of the squadron acquired a complete knowledge of the Breguet day bombardment plane and of the Renault motor, by daily visits to the nearby Michelin factory where the planes were made. The experience thus gained by assisting in the construction of the planes, and assembling the Renault motors in the factory, proved of immense value when the Squadron was sent to the Zone of Advance. Throughout seven months of operations at the front, the mechanical personnel of the 96th kept a maximum number of planes in commission. When hard put for spare parts, use was made of French farming implements, for such repairs as broken tail skids and longeroj braces, showing the ingenuity developed by factory study of Breguet construction.

On April 17th, Major Harry M. Brown, A.S., U.S.A. came to Clermont as commanding officer of the Squadron, relieving Captain Thomas, who became Adjutant. Exactly a month later, ten bombing teams (A Pilot and Observer) were assigned to the Squadron to fly the planes to the Z. of A.

The 96th Aero Squadron was ordered to Amanty Field, near Gondrecourt, May 18th, 1918, and became established as a bombing unit in active service against the enemy. The flying equipment of the Squadron consisted of ten old type instruction bombing planes, type Breguet 14 B 2, with 300 Horsepower type 12 F.E.V. Renault motors, which had been transferred by the 7th Aviation Instruction Center. The planes were in very poor condition, having been used for instruction since December, 1917, and were in constant need of major repairs even before used as bomb carriers. At Amanty ten more teams, who had come there a month before, were assigned to the squadron to complete its organization.

During the necessary period of inactivity, several practice flights were made covering the rear area of the sector and giving the Pilots the opportunity of flying together. At this time the question of which type of formation to use became a vital one. The Independent Air Force of the British Army, then operating in the Vicinity had been having marked success with a six plane formation of De Havilland 4's and 9's, while the French were using large V formations of the Voldu Canard" type.



By practical experience in the practice flights, it was determined that 'the British formation was not adapted to the Breguet plane because of the visibility and difficulty of steady flying. It was eventually decided to adopt a seven plane formation, using the French system in the following manner.



This incidentally proved very effective until some two months later when the greatly increased enemy activity in the sector made larger formations advisable.

At this time, through the courtesy of General Trenchard, Major A. Gray, Commanding Officer of the British 55th Squadron, I.A.F. came to

spend ten days as an informal adviser of the Squadron. He was able to give many practical hints which were of great value in our work. At the same time, we were able to send on team, 1st Lieut. Cecil G. Sellers and 1st Lieut. Howard G. Rath, to the 55th Squadron, to observe their methods.

Major Brown, Squadron Commander, ordered the Engineering Department to have the planes ready for active operations within two weeks after the arrival at the front. This was accomplished under the able direction of M.S.E. J.W. Sawyer, by robbing parts from old worn out farm machinery, discarded by French peasants in the vicinity of the airdrome. Part of a weather beaten harvester was used for tail skids, and pieces of the oxcart tongue were employed to reinforce the wing spars of several planes. One of the planes carried brace wires which had once served on the telephone line of communications. Plane No. 4014 was crashed in a bad field, and was salvaged for spare parts. Every one of the remaining nine planes, when put on the available list, carried some part of plane No. 4014, and thus the Squadron was able to operate long before spare parts from the Supply Depot at Colombey les Belles were obtained.

The first bombing mission undertaken by the 96th was an event which excited great interest in the sector. Late afternoon of June 12, found eight planes loaded with bombs and ready for the long anticipated raid to a hostile objective, in this case, Dommary-Baroncourt. General Trenchard, commanding the British Independent Air Force in France, was present with several members of his staff, also a number of officials representing British, French and American aviation. The squadron was practically without precedent for guidance, as it was isolated from other flying squadrons and had only two pilots on the rolls who had ever crossed the lines. Pictures of Major Brown and the pilots and observers scheduled to make the raid were taken. At 4:20 PM, the flight took off, Major Brown leading, with 1st Lieut. Howard G. Rath acting as his observer. Owing to the worn out condition of the motors, considerable time was spent in attaining a bombing altitude of 4000 meters. The objective was reached without mishap, save that two planes were forced to return because of motor trouble. The Squadron's baptism of anti-aircraft fire was received over Etain. The "Archies" were particularly active and accurate over the objective. Lieut. Rath bombed into the wind, and scored a good hit. Bursts were observed in the railroad yards, and the trail of bombs, 640 kilos in all, extended to the warehouses beyond the tracks. No photographs were obtained. The formation was attacked on the return flight by two enemy scouts and one biplane fighter. The pilots closed in and held a tight formation, however, and the observers were able to beat off the attack after crossing our lines. One of the planes, piloted by 1st Lieut. Charles P. Anderson, received two explosive bullets in the motor, but was able to reach the airdrome. Three planes were forced to land with empty gasoline tanks, but all landed safely. The other three arrived at the airdrome at 8 PM. that night, the entire squadron joined in a camp jubilee to celebrate the unqualified success of the first American bombing raid.

It is interesting to note that we used on this raid the only bombs which we had to secure--the 115 mm short bomb, which could not be effective against a railroad objective, but for our next raid, we had the 115 mm long bomb, including the 90 m/m fragmentation bombs for use against personnel and the 155 mm for use against railroads and other heavily constructed objectives.

The next mission was notable for speed in accomplishment. 1st Lieut. Andre H. Gundelach, with 2nd. Lieut. Pennington H. Way, as leading observer, led a formation of five planes to Conflans, and successfully bombed the railroad yards and roundhouse. The anti-aircraft fire was extremely active and accurate at the objective. A total of 612 kilos of bombs were dropped. The formation returned two hours after leaving the field. Conflans was again bombed by five planes on June 18th, 1st Lieut. Thornton D. Hooper leading, with Lieut. Rath as observer. 780 kilos of bombs were dropped; bursts were observed in the railroad yards. On June 22nd a formation started for Conflans but was forced to return to the field before crossing the lines. A small formation of four planes bombed the Conflans railroad yards June 25th, dropped 640 kilos. The visibility was very poor, but the observers saw several bursts in the eastern end of the yards. On June 26th, 27th, and 28th, and July 5th, Major Brown attempted to lead formations to Longuyon, but was forced to return each time because of the great number of planes dropping out, and the adverse weather conditions. The clouds' ceiling was impenetrable, and baffled every attempt to carry out a mission.

On July 6th occurred the first tragic accident, 1st Lieut. Roger Clapp, who had been testing a plane with Sergeant 1 cl Robert J. Dunn as passenger, went into a stall when preparing to land on the field. The plane windslipped 200 meters to the ground and burst into flames. Both Pilot and observer were killed. The plane was a total loss. Funeral services were held the next day at Gondrecourt.

The first big loss to the 96th came on July 10th, 1917, when a formation of six planes, led by Major Brown, was forced to land in hostile territory. All day the weather had been extremely unfavorable, but the clouds seemed to lift in the late afternoon. The formation left the airdrome at 6:05 PM, and was almost immediately swallowed up by the descending clouds. A strong southwest wind swept the planes northward, but the sky did not completely close until an hour after the take off. It is supposed that the leader was unable to find the objective on account of the storm and unable to recross the lines against the wind before the gasoline gave out. A Ferman wireless message was intercepted that night, stating that five American bombing planes attempting a raid on Coblenz, had been captured. The next day the sixth plane was heard from, also in German hands. All the pilots and observers were reported safe.

The command of the Squadron evolved on Captain James A. Summersett, Jr., until the arrival of Major J. L. Dunsworth, July 16th. For two weeks the squadron had two planes on hand, with one

available for duty. This last plane, No. 4018, Squadron No. 18, has had a remarkable history. It was used for instruction purposes for six months at the 7th A. I. C. before being sent to the front, where it became a favorite of flight leaders. No. 18, piloted by Major Brown, was the first plane to cross the lines, carrying bombs on an American Air Raid. It was also the first plane to carry the squadron insignia of a devil throwing a bomb, designed by Lieut. H. O. Lawson.

This plane was out of commission with motor trouble when Major Brown led the formation into Germany, July 10th, and it thus escaped capture. On September 13, No. 18, piloted by 1st Lieut. C. P. Anderson broke its propeller on the take off, and was forced to land in a nearby field. Of the three planes able to continue the flight, two were shot down, one in flames. On September 16th, Captain David H. Young, attempted to fly No. 18, but the hood flapped back before taking to the air. On this raid, all four planes in the formation failed to return. The curious good fortune of this particular plane was a constant cause for wonder in the Squadron. Although still serviceable, when the armistice was signed, it carried no less than 110 black crosses, earned for that number of bullets and shrapnel holes. On one raid, the whole right side of the fuselage covering from the Pilot's cockpit to the rudder post was torn open with shrapnel. The tail section was replaced three times; the lower wings six times, the upper wings twice and the landing carriage twice. The only portion of the original plane left intact is the fuselage from the observers' cockpit to the engine bed. No pilot or observer has been killed in NO. 18, although a wounded pilot, 1st Lieut. A. H. Alexander, brought his wounded observer, 2nd. Lieut. J. C. E. McLennan back to the field after a terrific fight, September 4th, 1918. No. 18 has a record of 270 hours in the air, 100 of which are over the lines. It is treasured as the first and most lasting flying equipment used in operations, and is the object of considerable squadron sentiment.

Another plane with an interesting history which reflects particular credit upon the enlisted personnel of the squadron is that of old No. 16, which was crashed and sent to the 1st Air Depot at Colombey-les-Belles for repairs. There the plane was condemned and at the squadron's request, it was returned. Our E. & R. Department, under M.S.E. Grant, reconstructed this plane and it was later flown 32 hours over the lines before its final crash.

In August, when the enemy aircraft activity began to be very severe, the technical Branch of the Air Service sent 20 tunnel guns to be installed in our planes. It was found that the mounting for the guns was not satisfactory, and M.S.E. Grant designed an entirely original method of mounting them, which gave absolute satisfaction.

Another example of original work was the design of a dual control for dropping bombs. This was designed by Sgt 1 cl John B. Ballard of the Armament Department. We had found from experience that with the exception of the leading and deputy leading observers, who both had sights, it was impossible to secure uniform bombing, due to the fact,

that observers frequently failed to see in time the bombs drop from the leading plane. As the pilots were constantly watching the leader, it was assumed that they could drop the bombs themselves with better results. The Breguet plane is not equipped with dual bomb control and when Sergeant Ballard installed his apparatus, it greatly increased the efficiency of the squadron's work.

During the third week of July, eleven new Breguets, including two Corps d' Armee type, with photographic equipment, were delivered to the squadron. Many practice formations and bomb tests were held on flying days, while the Engineering Department prepared the planes for over the lines duty. Replacements of pilots and observers had arrived so that the squadron had 16 teams available for duty.

The first raid with the new equipment was carried out August 1st, when eight planes, in a double V formation, bombed the warehouses and the railroad yards at Conflans. 960 kilos of bombs were dropped; the exposure, although unsuccessful on this raid, valuable information regarding railroad activities was brought back by the observers. The bursts were well bunched in the yards. That night, the empty French hangars at Epiez, two kilometers east of the Amanty field were bombed by a German night raider. The plane descended to within 200 feet of the hangars, but the bombs were trailed 40 feet in front of them, causing no damage. It was thought that the raid had for its original objective, the 96th hangars, and that the enemy pilot made a mistake.

OPERATIONS OF THE ST. MIHIEL.

Adverse weather, high winds and formidable low clouds prevented extensive flying until August 11, when Captain Cecil G. Sellers led a formation to Montmedy and dropped 1120 kilos of bombs, cutting the railroad track at the outskirts. On August 12, the first successful photographs were obtained of bombs bursting in the railroad yards at Conflans. 1st Lieut. Arthur H. Kelly, Photographic Officer of the Squadron, solved the difficulty of getting pictures by directing his pilot to lag behind the formation after the release of the bombs. Then by diving, it was possible to tilt the plane and get a back shot at the bursts. The later introduction of the pivoted camera made this maneuver unnecessary. On August 23, 1st Lieut. Bradley J. Gaylord made a raid with a formation to Dommary-Baroncourt, where good hits were made on the tracks with 880 kilos of bombs. August 14 was the first day on which the squadron was able to carry out two distinct missions, one to Longuyon in the morning and a second to Dommary-Baroncourt in the afternoon. On the return from Longuyon, the squadron had its first "Close In" combat with enemy scouts. The formation, led by Captain Cecil G. Sellers, had dwindled down to five planes, which were seen by members of the German pursuit squadron stationed near Longuyon. Upon approaching the objective, the pilots and observers flew the enemy planes taking off from their field, and watched them gain altitude in remarkable short time. The enemy planes, numbering four, attacked from the sun, opening fire at 400 yards distance. Captain Sellers outguessed the enemy by flying

straight for the attacking formation, which broke up to begin the attack from the rear. The enemy planes followed the Breguet formation to the lines. Two planes were hit by anti-aircraft fire, but all returned safely to the airdrome. 1440 kilos of bombs were dropped that day.

Two raids were carried out the following day, one to Dommar-Baroncourt, on which good hits were scored, and the second to Conflans which was hotly attacked by 11 enemy scouts after releasing the bombs. In the combat which lasted till the lines were crossed, one enemy plane, thought to be an Albatross, went down out of control. Lieut. Gundelach, flight leader, was slightly injured in the left leg by a spent bullet. One plane was riddled with bullets, even to the tires, but the Pilot, 1st Lieut. C. P. Young, made a successful landing at the airdrome. This was the first really close up fight that the Squadron had, and in it we learned the danger of flying steadily in such an attack. While it is absolutely essential to maintain a tight formation, nevertheless the plane which flies on a straight course offers a very good target to the enemy and at the same time the seedy position of the tail empennage obstructs the observer's shooting. In this fight, each plane brought back an increasing number of bullet holes with the lack of the Pilots' maneuvering.

Dommary-Baroncourt was hit again on the 16th of the month, Longuyon on the 20th and 21st, Audun-le-Roman on the 21 and Conflans once on the 22nd and twice on the 23rd, again on the 26th and Longuyon on the 25th. August 30th was a banner day for raids; Conflans was bombed at daylight; Longuyon at noon and Conflans again in the early evening. During the 14 flying days of August, the 96th carried out 20 successful raids, dropping 19,480 kilos of bombs. Precision bombing attained a high efficiency among the leading observers so that perfect hits were the rule. The average number of planes available was ten; the loss in planes was two. Tunnel guns were installed for the observer to use in case of an attack from under the tail. Apparatus was installed with which bombs could be released by the pilot, and thus enable the observer to give his attention to reconnaissance or fighting off the enemy air planes. The end of the month found the squadron well supplied with the latest equipment and prepared to continue the record setting pace in number of raids per flying days.

Flying with the 96th was a much appreciated privilege before the ST. Mihiel offensive. The sector had been quiet for nearly two years and although the anti-aircraft batteries around such objectives as Conflans and Audun-le-Roman were uncomfortably accurate, the enemy scout squadrons were very cautious and seldom attacked save when greatly superior in numbers. Moreover the flying personnel of the 96th was eager to prove worthy of the honor of pioneering American aerial bombardment in the war, and put forth its greatest efforts to attain a reputation as a hard fighting unit.

The battle was highly victorious for the 96th; one enemy plane was brought down without fatal casualties to the squadron. The

incident served to greatly diminish the fear of the fast enemy scouts of the enemy, as they had been met and defeated in a forty minute combat, with the advantage of numbers in their favor. The pilots acquired the art of holding tight formation during a running fight all the while zooming and diving in constant relative positions to each other. Maneuvering when under fire had the double purpose of permitting the observers to get in point blank burst and making it impossible for the enemy planes to keep the Breguets in the dead center of their gun sights.

September 12, which opened the great St. Mihiel offensive, was, on all counts the worst flying day in many months. A terrific southwest wind made formation flying extremely dangerous, and the low fast moving clouds made it impossible to see more than two or three kilometers. In the morning the cloud ceiling was very low, but the afternoon brought clear spaces with no decrease in the violence of the wind.

The first mission undertaken was a solo raid by 1st Lieut. Andre H. Gundelach, pilot, and 2nd. Lieut. Pennington H. Way, observer, who left the airdrome at 10:45 AM. The objective was Buxieres, where hostile troops were concentrating. Lieut. Gundelach's plane carried 32 ninety millimeter personnel bombs, a record load for a Breguet in the fairest of weather. The plane did not return, and was later reported to have come down in flames south of Commercy. Lieut. Gundelach jumped; his body was found at some distance from the wreck. Lieut. Way was burned to death. As no bombs were found in the wreckage, it was presumed that the mission had been accomplished.

At 1:30 PM, eight planes, led by Captain D. H. Young, bombed the troop center at Buxerulles. The formation crossed directly over St. Mihiel at 2:15 at 700 Meters, but did not draw a single shot from the anti-aircraft batteries, showing that the withdrawal of enemy troops from the salient had already begun. The objective seemed to be deserted, and in ruins. A perfect hit was made, the bombs cutting a trail through the town.

The third mission of the day, a formation of five planes, led by Captain J. A. Summersett Jr., was to bomb the troops at Vigneulles. Owing to the lateness of starting, 6:35 PM, the objective was not reached until after dark. The bombs were released over the town, but observation of the hits was impossible. The formation returned to the airdrome in the darkness, the pilots guiding on the exhaust fires from the planes ahead of them. Landing at the field was attempted with the aid of ground flares, but only one of four planes landed successfully. One plane crashed in the forest back of the hangars, the other two piled up on the field. The fifth plane, piloted by 1st Lieut. E. M. Cronin, crashed on a ploughed field near Gondrecourt. The pilot was killed. The observer, 2nd Lieut. Lyman C. Bleecker, was uninjured.

The end of the first day found the squadron badly crippled having lost three of the personnel, killed, and eight planes wrecked or put

out of commission. The clinging mud of the field caused many broken propellers, and the high wind made it necessary for the mechanics to hold the wings while the planes were taxied to and from the starting line. During the day many refugee planes landed because of the terrific wind. One Salmson, in attempting to land near the hangers, drifted into two Breguets loaded with bombs. All three planes were completely wrecked, but fortunately the contact bombs did not explode. The morning of the 13th dawned wet and cloudy with a treacherous wind still blowing and five lonesome Breguets on the alert at the 96th hangars.

At 3:15 P.M., the five available planes were ordered out to bomb the roads between Chambley and Mrs-le-Tour. Four planes left the ground, but one was forced to land in a nearby field. The other three continued the mission, and bombed the ammunition dump at Chambley from an altitude of 1000 Meters. The planes were surrounded at the objective by 15 enemy scouts. In the terrible fight which ensued, two planes were shot down, 1st Lt. Thomas H. Farnsworth, pilot, and 2nd Lt. R. E. Thompson, observer went down in control; 2d Lt Stephen T. Hopkins, pilot, and 1st Lt. Bertram Williams, observer, went down in flames. Lt. Gaylord, pilot and Lt. Rath, observer, managed to cut their way to the lines and landed safely at the airdrome. One enemy plane was shot down in the combat.

The losses of the first two days in no way disheartened the fliers of the 96th. Ten planes were ready for the first raid on the morning of the 16th. The formation, which left the field with Capt. D. H. Young, continued to the objective despite the fact that the formation had dwindled down to three planes. Conflans was reached, concealed by several layers of clouds. A favorable opening permitted the formation to descend below the clouds and the leading observer, 1st Lt. Lunt, scored a perfect hit at the neck of the railroad yards. Enemy aircraft began to appear before the objective was reached, despite which, 1st Lt Bruce C. Hopper, pilot of the photographic plane, maneuvered over the city until his observer, 1st Lt. Arthur H. Kelly, obtained pictures of the bursts. A game of hide and seek in the clouds with 20 enemy planes was the program for the next half hour. The third plane, 1st Lt. Charles P. Anderson, pilot and 1st Lt Hugh S. Thompson, observer, closed in abreast of the other two, allowing the three observers to keep up a constant barrage while the pilots maneuvered in and out of the cloud alleys. All three planes landed safely at the home field. Two other missions were carried out that day, bombing successfully the troops on the roads between Vittonville and Armonville, on the Moselle River. The bridge at Arnville was bombed the next day, and Longuyon and the 15th and 16th. Enemy planes were encountered, but their attacks were not persistent.

Conflans was successfully bombed in the early afternoon of the 16th. A third formation was sent to bomb Conflans at 5:00 P.M. Four planes remained in the formation after crossing the lines, were seen near the objective, but never returned. They were never heard from. The missing pilots are 1st Lt. Charles P. Anderson, 1st Lt Raymond C.

Taylor, 1st Lt Charles R. Codman, 1st Lt Newton C. Rogers. The missing observers with these pilots were: 1st Lt Hugh S. Thompson, 1st Lt. William A. Stuart, 2nd Lt Stuart A. McDowell, and 2d Lt Kenneth P. Strawn.

During the entire St. Miheil offensive the squadron was operating under the most discouraging conditions of adverse weather and shortage of planes and flying personnel. The losses in four days were 16 fliers, including 2nd Lt James A. O'Toole, who was assigned to detached duty as a courier, and 14 planes, destroyed in combats with many of Germany's ace squadrons, which had been moved to this sector, was that big, tight formations were necessary to successful bombing operations. The heavy losses were due to small formations of three or four planes being completely wiped out. A large formation with a tight rear line is almost invulnerable.

On September 12, orders came forming the 1st Day Bombardment Group, with Major Dunsworth in command. The group consisted of the 96th, 20th and 11th Aero Squadron and Flight "A" of the 848th Park Squadron. Two days later, Capt James A. Summersett, Jr. was assigned as Commanding Officer of the 96th.

The Squadron continued to operate from the Amaty Field, dropping propaganda as well as bombs, until September 23, when the 1st Day Bombardment Group; was moved to Maulan, near Ligny-en-Barrois, to prepare for the Argonne Drive.

THE ARGONNE DRIVE

The first raid of the Argonne offensive was a mission to Dun-sur-Meuse, carried out with the usual success. The formation of six planes was attacked by ten Fokkers and Pfalz scouts. 2nd Lt Paul J. O'Donnell, Inf., USA, observer was killed in the combat. Two of the enemy planes were shot down out of control between Clery and Cunel. Etain was bombed just before dark, September 27th, by a formation of 12, all of which returned safely. A total of 2400 kilos of bombs were dropped on this raid. On September 29th a highly successful raid was carried out with Grandpre as objective. 12 planes reached Grandpre, dropping 1600 kilos of bombs. For the first time since the squadron had been operating the pursuit planes cooperated closely with the bombers. The protection afforded by pursuit planes, though often of an indirect kind, was of immense value for precision bombing. The observers were able to make careful calculations regarding certain of doing their best work if undisturbed by the enemy scouts.

The 96th had plenty of planes, but was short of pilots and observers to carry out the operation orders on a large scale. Accordingly flying personnel was borrowed from the 11th and 20th Squadrons. The formations would leave the ground numbering 17 to 20 planes, and allowing for motor trouble and other difficulties due to difference in range of speed, there generally would be a tight formation of 12 to 14 planes when the objective was reached. The

success of the big formations was best, did more to raise the spirits and courage of the squadron than any incident in its history. When attacked, the planes could form a tighter fighting rear line than in a small formation and often the sight of a well organized large formation was enough to warn enemy scouts of the hot reception to expect should they attack. It was the custom for wounded pilots or pilots whose observers were wounded to fly either over or under the leader, and thus enjoy the protection of this entire formation. In a small formation, two or three severely wounded observers eventually leads to the complete destruction of the whole flight, if the attack is organized and persistent.

One of the first successes with a large formation was the bombing of Banthville, October 1st, with 13 planes in "vol du canard" Lt. Hopper, Flight leader, Lt, Kelly, leading observer. 1240 kilos of bombs made great havoc in the town, starting three fires with incendiaries. On October 2nd, 14 planes dropped 1220 kilos of bombs on Cornay with good results. Eight enemy planes attacked before the lines were recrossed; one of our planes went down, but reached allied territory, bring down one enemy plane in the descent. October 3rd, 1530 kilos were dropped on Grandpre. Eight enemy planes attacked but were driven off, by the fire of the observers. Eight big bursts were observed in the town, four in the railroad yards; three fires were started by the incendiaries. Dun-sur-Meuse and Landres St. Georges received 1160 kilos of bombs each on Oct. 4th; fires started in each town; the hits were in dead centers of the towns trailing to the outskirts. Combats were fought on each of the raids for the day. Fifteen enemy planes, Pfaltz and Fokker scouts attacked over Dun-sur-Meuse, and continued the fight for 21 minutes. One of our planes, 1st Lt J. B. Pearson of the 11th and Private C. J. Newby, observer, went down with white smoke issuing from the motor. Although closely pursued by two enemy planes, Lt Pearson escaped, both he and the observer being wounded. All our planes were badly shot up. In the fight over Landres St, Georges, against 30 enemy scouts, the 96th did not lose a single plane but brought down two of the enemy. When the fight was at its height, a group of American pursuit planes arrived and mixed with the enemy in what is popularly called a "dog fight". The Spads claimed eleven of the enemy. Bombing during the early days of the Argonne drive was extremely precarious because of low clouds. It was necessary to fly at least 500 meters below the cloud ceiling which varied from 1800 to 2200 meters, to avoid offering a perfect target to the archies. The clouds too, made wonderful lurking pockets for the enemy scouts.

Landres St. Georges was again visited by a large formation October 5th and Bantheville, October 6th. Fires and explosions were caused in both towns by the bombs. October 10th was a two raid day, one on which Milly-devant-Dun was bombed through the clouds, and the other a regular dose of high explosives to Dun-sur-Meuse proper. A few wet days succeeded these flying days, giving the squadron a much enjoyed rest.

October 18th is a record date in the annals of the Squadron. A formation of 14 planes, led by Lt. Hopper, and Lt. Kelly, reaching its objective, Sivry, with all its planes, and trailed bombs through the center of the town and to the roads beyond. Lt. Col. Thomas S. Bowen, commander of the Group, was on this raid as an observer, and joined in the fight which ensued. 1600 kilos of bombs, including 40 of the new incendiaries were dropped. According to intelligence reports from French sources, 250 men were killed, and 700 wounded on this raid. Fifteen Fokkers and Pfaltz scout planes were encountered, but their attack was not well organized. One Fokker attacked the leader from off the right wing, a blind spot on the Breguet, and managed to escape by diving under the right side of the formation line.

The highly satisfactory raid to Bayonville was the last of the big formations. From then on to the last operation, the formations which reached the objectives were dangerously small in view of the large number of enemy scouts constantly on the alert. The shortage in planes, due to forced landings around the sector was the chief cause for the return to small formations. On October 23rd, Capt Belmont F. Beverly led a formation of area planes to Bois-de-la-Casine. The formation was attacked by twelve Pfaltz and Fokkers, and succeeded in bringing down two of the enemy. One of our planes had its gas tank pierced, and was forced to land at Clermont-en-Argonne, where it crashed. The next big fight was over Briquenay, when a formation of ten planes led by 1st Lt L. F. Turnbull, encountered six Fokkers, and brought down one. 2nd Lt Walton B. TenEyck Jr., was wounded in the shoulder and arm, but managed to land his plane safely. 1st Lt Henry L. Pancoast was shot through the stomach and lungs; his pilot, landed near a hospital back of the lines. Two of our planes had forced landings near the Argonne Forest. The 96th brought down two more enemy scouts out of 15 encountered on a raid to Danvillers October 29th. 1st Lt Gilbert Stanley, pilot, and 2nd Lt. H. T. Folger, observer, were wounded in the combat and forced to land at a hospital near Verdun. The last raid of October was on the last day of the month, on which Taily was bombed. Enemy planes were seen, but not encountered.

The last fight of the 96th proved, to be the hottest of its many encounters with enemy airplanes. A formation of five planes bombed Montmedy, where photographs taken show wonderful hits. 15 Pfaltz attacked before a turn could be made at the objective, and continued to harass the formation for 20 minutes. The leader, Capt D. H. Young maneuvered his plane so skillfully, with the rest of the formation following close, that the enemy could not find a steady target. Our observers brought down two enemy planes, one in flames. 1st Lt Henry J. Spalding was shot through both hands. The plane piloted by 1st Lt P. E. Lakin had its elevator control wires shot away, forcing a dangerous landing at Beiraine. 1st Lt. R. P. Elliot's plane was also badly shot up, and forced to land at Clermont. An enemy bullet shot off 1st Lt H. O. McDouglas' goggles, and four other penetrated his fur combination without injuring him. The fight was voted by all as the

fiercest and most persistent to the credit of the 96th and worthy of being its last and final stroke of the war.

NOTE: This is presumed to have been written by a member of the 96th Aero Squadron and is presumed to be factual.