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Article Summary: National Guard aviation did not really become effective until sufficient federal funds became available in the 1920s. The Army had initially considered the airplane a communications device and had placed the aviation section under the Signal Corps, which severely stunted its development as a military weapon. Pioneer airmen Captain Ralph E McMillen of Nebraska, Captain Ralph L Taylor of Connecticut, and L P Billard of Kansas were instrumental in the initial development of National Guard aviation but did not live to see its transition to prominence.

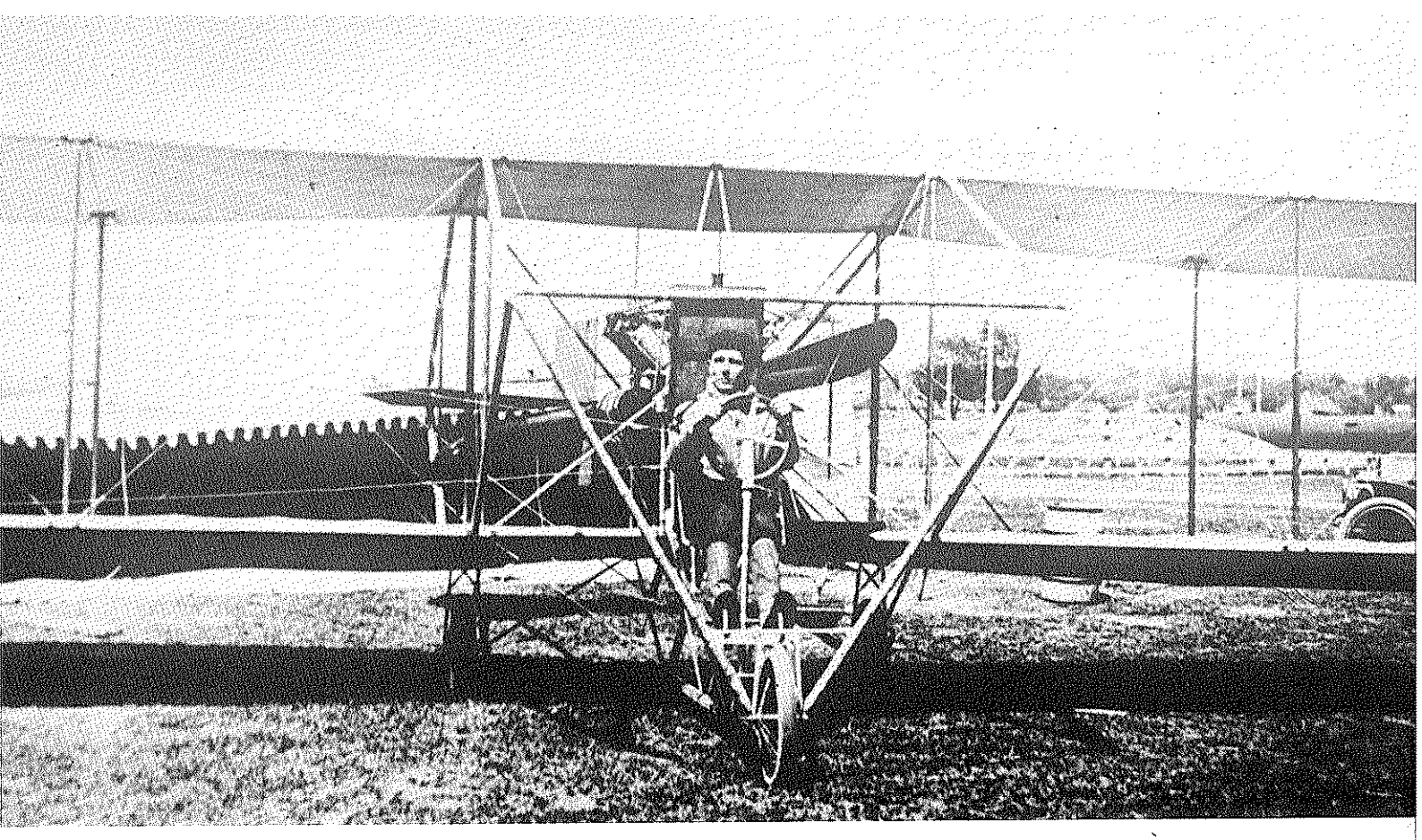
Cataloging Information:

Surnames: Ralph E McMillen; Castle W Schaffer; George A Eberly; Edgar Bagnell; John H Morehead; James C Dahlman; Alan R Hawley; Ralph L Taylor; Josephus Daniels; Tandy N Dillon; Ernest R Wells; William A Lovelady; Alva N White; Robert P Chesney; Fred Bolton; Harley J Devoe; Leo D Westover; Joe E Westover; Fred E Roberts; Roscoe J Craig; Walter T Hansen; William A Simpson; Joseph E Carberry; Overton M Bounds; H W Blakely; Bertrand B Acosta; Raynal C Bolling; Miss Ruth Law; Captain L P Billard; E E Newbold; [See also inset listing on page 17 of the article of 16 National Guardsmen]

Place Names: Perry, Iowa; Julesberg, Colorado; York, Nebraska; Lincoln, Nebraska; Fremont, Nebraska; New York; Platte River; Camp L D Richards; Beaver Crossing, Nebraska; Crete, Nebraska; Columbus, New Mexico; Texas; Mexico; Arizona; New Mexico; Paris, France; Llano Grande, Texas; Mineola, New York; Kelly Field, Texas; Post Field, Oklahoma

Keywords: "Curtiss Model D" "Nebraska Militia" "Nebraska NG" "Department of Militia Affairs" "War Department" "Curtiss Aeroplane Co" "General Orders No 17" "4th Infantry" "5th Infantry" "Signal Corps" "Biennial Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Nebraska" "Aviation Squadron" "Francisco Villa's Raid" "Federal Aeronautique Internationale" "FAI" "Aero Club" "RMA" "MA" "Regular Army" "Curtiss Twin JN" "National Defense Act" "Organized Militia" "Curtiss OX-2" "JN-4" "Jennies"

Photographs / Images: Capt Ralph E McMillen in Curtiss Model D; Curtiss Model D in 1913; Aerial Photo of Nebraska State Capitol in 1916; Guardsman Edgar W (Happy) Bagnell, R M Olyphant, D R Noyes and supply officer Wheeler, 1916 New York; Charles B Winder, Leighton W Hazelhurst, Thomas Milling, and Paul Beck, Pilot Training, College Park, Maryland, 1912; Omaha World-Herald excerpt from feature article on Edgar W Bagnell, Omaha; Lieutenant Edgar W Bagnell with Army Curtiss JN-4 1916-1917



Captain Ralph E. McMillen of the Nebraska National Guard in his Curtiss Model D, probably at his home in Perry, Iowa. Because of a plane crash in 1912 in which he broke both legs, McMillen never was mustered into the Regular Army as a pilot. While flying an exhibition at the St. Francis, Kansas, fair on September 2, 1916, McMillen was killed. (Courtesy of Mrs. Marjorie Patterson, Perry Chief, *and the Nebraska National Guard)*

THE AVIATION CORPS OF THE NEBRASKA NATIONAL GUARD, 1915-1917

By ROBERT B. CASARI

The United States Army became seriously interested in aviation as an adjunct to the Signal Corps in 1907, ordering its first airplane, a Wright Model A, the following year. This machine was considered little more than an experimental novelty and funds were so limited for the next few years that the single available pilot sometimes had to pay for the operating expenses himself. It was not until 1911 that a second airplane was ordered, and during the few years remaining until the beginning of the war in Europe, the air arm of the United States expanded very slowly, having only about ten machines by mid-1914. These amounted to little more than elementary trainers and the country was already many years behind most European nations in building a useful military aviation branch.

The reasons were many. The Army had initially considered the airplane as a communications device and had placed the aviation section under the Signal Corps where its development as a military weapon was severely stunted. However, far more significant was the minuscule funding that it received from the Congress which eliminated any possibility of expanding the organization and equipping it at a level which would have permitted its development. Annual appropriations were so low that even by 1916 only one squadron of twelve airplanes could be maintained in field service along the southern border with a single aviation school located at San Diego, California. In contrast, the warring countries across the Atlantic had thousands of aircraft in use which were far ahead of American machines in their specialization.

In this pre-war era the National Guard was known as the Organized Militia (though both terms were used interchangeably) and did not officially take on its present name until the National Defense Act of 1916 was passed. The individual state militias had existed since colonial days and were essentially independent but subject to call under state or national emergencies. While the Department of Militia Affairs in the War Department coordinated activities of the Regular Army and the militia of the various states, it had not been until 1900 that federal funds had been appropriated for state use[1] and the act of 1903 had placed limitations on use of the militia while in federal service.[2] As a result the state units in peace-time operated independently of the Army and funds were provided almost entirely by the states themselves.

Development of an aviation branch in the militias faced funding difficulties similar to those of the Army and progressed at the same almost undiscernable rate. Many states had small air branches in 1916, but with the exception of New York, none were financially able to support them adequately. The experiences of the Nebraska Militia in this period are typical and illustrate very well the problems encountered by most. During the years from 1913 to 1916, activities there resembled those of the first three years of the United States Army aviation section and were little more than a one-plane, one-man operation which finally withered and disappeared not to rise again until the next decade.

It was in 1913 that the Nebraska NG began development of an aviation section, when the officers and men of the signal corps branch "built" a biplane at Fremont, Nebraska. This machine so closely resembled the Curtiss Aeroplane Company's Model D that there is little doubt it was actually a purchased Curtiss D and was only assembled by the Militia. It had no fuselage, had an engine mounted between the wings driving a pusher propeller, and was fitted with three wheels. The pilot sat on an exposed seat ahead of the wings.

The Nebraska adjutant general's annual report contains a photograph of this airplane but makes no further mention of it.[3] The biplane must have been flown at Fremont, since it certainly was a practical design and not one of the many weird civilian designs of that period which met with failure. Its

identification with the signal corps signified a communications and reconnaissance function, though it is doubtful that operations ever became this refined. It probably participated there in the annual encampment, but there was as yet no official recognition of an aviation branch.

Interest continued, however, and the first acknowledgement took place in 1915 when Captain Castle W. Schaffer was made chief of aviation. Shortly after, Ralph E. McMillen, a qualified pilot, enlisted and was commissioned a captain in the small aviation group. Both men furnished their own airplanes, an indication of the shortage of finances that was to plague the Nebraska National Guard aviation section throughout its early history.

The question of how to raise funds for the flying branch was placed before the governor, who decided that the aviators should give exhibitions at county fairs and other public gatherings to supplement the very small funds that could be made available from the state. During the summer and fall of 1915, the two pilots attempted to do this, but Captain Schaffer encountered difficulties because of the poor condition of his machine and many times was unable to get it into the air. At the county fair at Julesburg, Colorado, he made one successful flight and then took off on a second. As he attempted to come down, the eager crowd swarmed into his landing place and he was forced to come down in an adjacent field, where rough buffalo wallows flipped over the airplane and heavily damaged the wing sections.[4] The captain may have given up flying following this accident, for all official flights by the Nebraska Militia during the summer of 1915 were done by Captain McMillen, and Schaffer's name does not appear in the October 23 list of officers successfully passing the Guard course of instruction and examination for 1915.[5]

Captain McMillen filled many dates with his Curtiss pusher-type biplane and had few accidents, apparently none of them serious. Once while flying at York, Nebraska, his engine stopped when he was over the center of the town, but he managed to glide to a safe landing.[6]

On July 15, 1915, the Nebraska Militia officially organized an Aviation Corps with headquarters at the state fairgrounds in Lincoln. The order which created the corps hints at plans for an

expanding unit to assume major responsibilities in the militia and is interesting enough to repeat here in its entirety.

STATE OF NEBRASKA,
Adjutant General's Department,
Office of the Adjutant General,
Lincoln, Nebr., July 15, 1915.

General Orders No. 17.

1. Under the provisions of Paragraph 3918, Section 20, Revised Statutes of Nebraska, an Aviation Corps is hereby organized, the word 'Corps' to be used for the organization. The rules and regulations governing the organization of the corps are as follows:

One plane is designated as a unit.
Two planes or more, not to exceed four, a squadron.

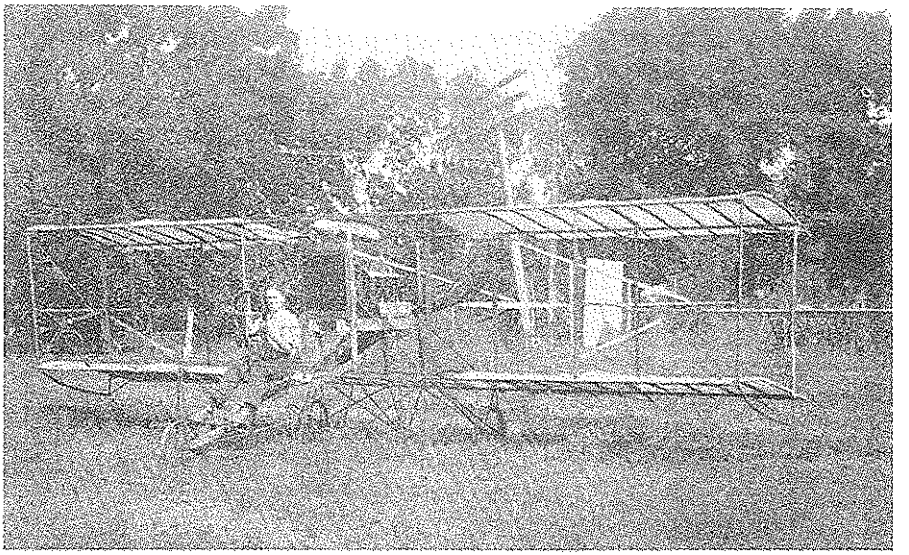
2. The following personnel will compose a unit:
One pilot with the rank of Captain.
One observer who may be assigned from any branch of the service not to exceed the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.
One signal man with the rank of First Lieutenant.
One plane man with the rank of Second Lieutenant.
One engine man with the rank of Second Lieutenant.
Two mechanic[i]ans with the rank of Sergeant.
Two motorcycle men with the rank of Corporal.
Six utility men with the rank of private.

3. The uniform for the commissioned personnel of this organization shall be the same as that for the Signal Corps, with the exception that attached to the crossed flags and torch there shall be silver wings for both dress and service uniforms for the collar devices. The uniform for the enlisted men shall be the same as that for the Signal Corps.

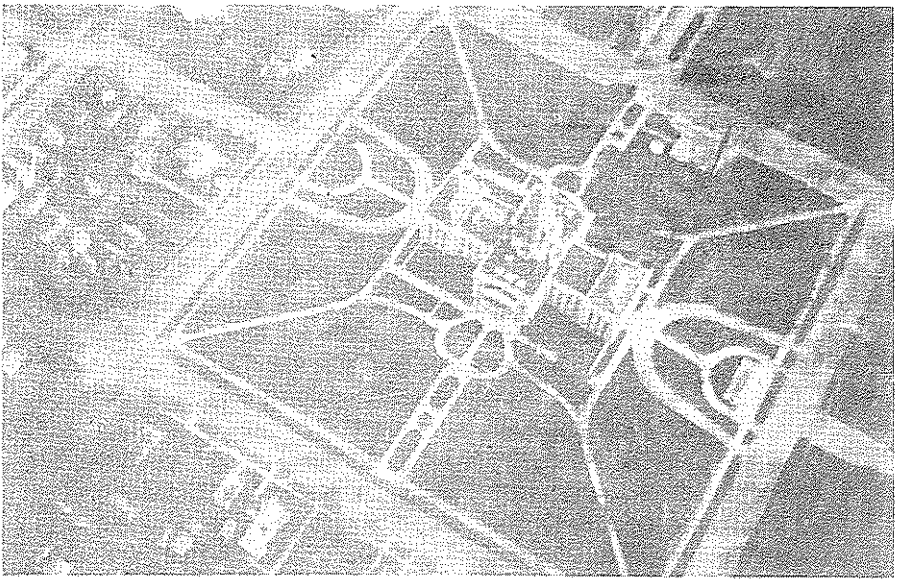
By Order of the Governor,
P.[HIL] L. HALL, JR.
Brigadier General, Chief of Staff.[7]

Official:

At the time the Nebraska Militia/National Guard was composed of only two regiments—the 4th Infantry, made up of companies north of the Platte River, (a convenient east-west dividing line); and the 5th Infantry, formed of companies to the south. The 4th and 5th had been created in 1913 by a reorganization of the 1st and 2nd Infantry Regiments.[8] On July 30, 1915, General Orders No. 18 called for the 4th to attend the annual Camp of Instruction at Fremont, Nebraska, from August 10 to 16 and the 5th to encamp at Crete, Nebraska, from August 19 to 25. Fremont is just north of the Platte River and about forty miles north of Lincoln, while Crete is twenty miles southwest of the capital, both convenient for moving the Aviation Corps from its headquarters. The aviation branch was not assigned to either of the regiments and apparently operated with each as conditions dictated.[9]



The Curtiss Model D which was built by members of the Signal Corps Aviation Section of the Nebraska National Guard at Fremont in 1913



Aerial photo of the Nebraska State Capitol in Lincoln in 1916 taken by Captain Ralph E. McMillen from an altitude of 4,000 feet.

The 4th Regiment arrived at Camp L. D. Richards just south of Fremont on August 9, and the Aviation Corps checked in at 9:30 p.m. Attending were fifty-two officers and 589 enlisted men, of whom four officers and nine men were assigned to the aviation branch.[10] One of the men was undoubtedly Edgar W. Bagnell, who had joined the National Guard as a private in 1912 and later became an accomplished pilot in the unit.[11]

During the seven days which followed, Captain McMillen flew a number of times. On August 13 at 6:30 p.m., he made a trip over the camp and Fremont. In his report to the adjutant general, Colonel George A. Eberly of the 4th Infantry commented on two outstanding flights. It was during the one on Sunday, August 15, that McMillen experimented with bombs dropped from the air, a flight which presaged future battle developments. That evening at about 7 p.m. the captain again made a "trial flight" that lasted fifteen minutes.[12]

The Aviation Corps was doubled in strength on August 14 when Edgar Bagnell was commissioned a first lieutenant in the Aviation Corps,[11] though he may not have been qualified since McMillen made all recorded flights at both encampments. Much of the captain's work was done in conjunction with the activities of the infantry who engaged in mock battles with the enemy, conducted reconnaissance missions, and built fortifications through August 16 when the companies of the 4th broke camp and the men returned to their homes.[13]

On August 19 the Camp of Instruction for the 5th Regiment opened at Crete with the aviation squadron reporting in at 10:30 a.m. Captain McMillen may have flown his airplane to the encampment because he did make a flight from Beaver Crossing to Crete "over unfamiliar territory," a distance of twenty-five miles. This was apparently a test to see if he could reach a destination which had been given to him by phone just before take off.[14] On Sunday, August 22, following church services, a mock battle was staged for the visiting public in which the 1st Battalion, in position, was attacked by the 2nd and 3rd Battalions. McMillen made two flights over the battle demonstrating aerial reconnaissance and attack (and perhaps bombing). The complete exercise lasted two hours. The captain was also an accomplished photographer whose work illustrated the 1915-1916 Biennual Report of the Adjutant General of the

State of Nebraska. During the two National Guard encampments he took many aerial photographs showing troop movements to prove the worth of this form of observation. The Aviation Squadron entrained at the end of the camp on the morning of the 25th for its return to Lincoln.[15]

McMillen made many flights during the rest of 1915 in the Lincoln area in which he continued to develop tactics and procedures for bomb dropping, aerial photography, night flying, and night signaling. One of his many pictures was of the state Capitol from a height of 4,000 feet. On November 21 he made a fifty-mile flight from Lincoln to Omaha with a message from Governor John H. Morehead to Mayor James C. Dahlman of Omaha. While the immediate value of these flights is questionable, the fact that such varied experimentation was conducted is an indication of the advanced thinking of the two officers who made up the Nebraska Aviation Corps in 1915—Captain McMillen and Lieutenant Bagnell.[16]

With winter's arrival flying activity dwindled and did not resume in strength until the spring of 1916, when Lieutenant Bagnell was probably a full pilot in the Nebraska unit. By this time there were far more serious problems than mere flying, for the country was on the verge of war with Mexico following Francisco Villa's raid on Columbus, New Mexico, in March and the Punitive Expedition's invasion of Mexican territory under General John J. Pershing to disperse the bandit's forces. The situation became serious enough that the secretary of war issued a call on May 9 to the states of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona to place their militia units on the border under Army control.[17]

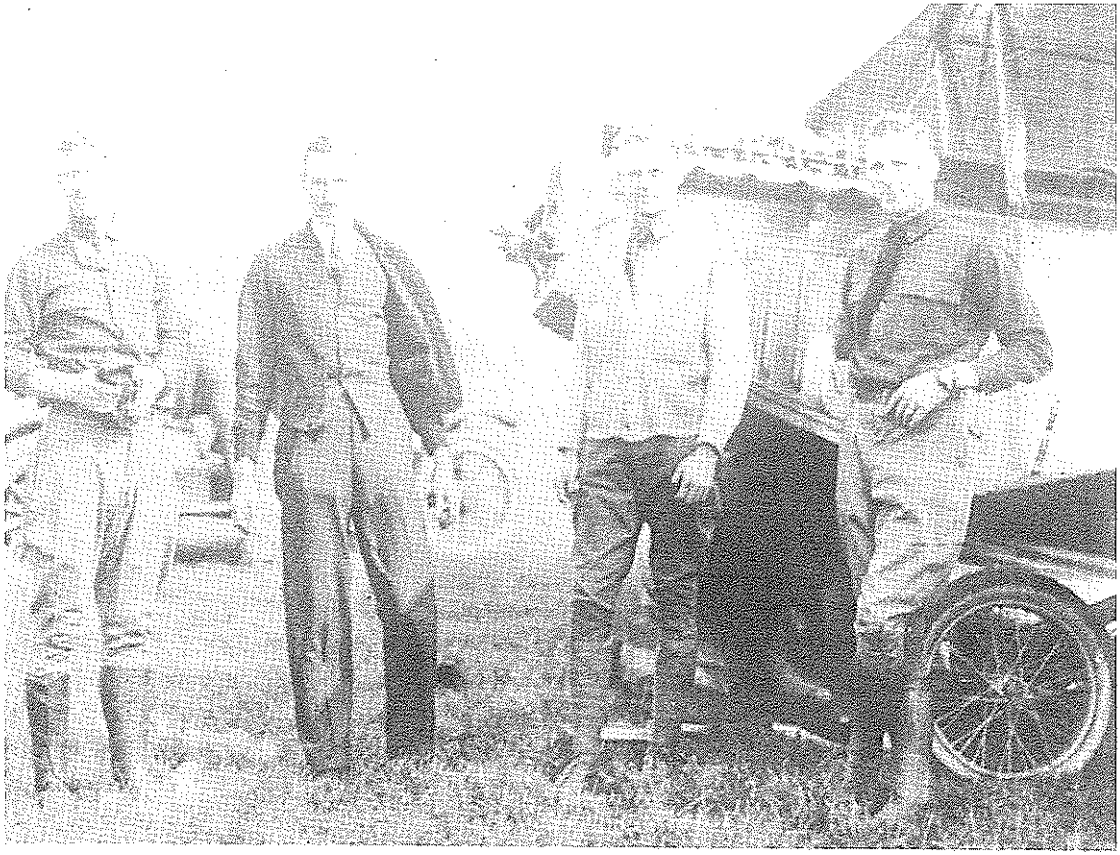
While conditions were worsening between the two countries, the Nebraska Aviation Corps received some assistance from the Aero Club of America. This organization, with headquarters in New York City, had been publicizing the weak condition of military aviation in the United States, and had undertaken a huge fund-raising campaign to finance the training of hundreds of civilian pilots for potential military service. Besides providing training the funds collected also purchased a small number of airplanes for several state militia and naval militia organizations, mostly along the East Coast. The Aero Club was also interested in improving the condition of National Guard units across the

country and was a strong influence in Congress in pushing for new legislation and increased appropriations. It was perhaps only natural that the 1st Aero Company of New York State received more assistance than any other.

In order to become a military aviator, it was necessary that a person be able to do far more than merely fly an airplane. In the case of McMillen and Bagnell, both had reached a high level of aeronautical knowledge but may not have had certificates from the Aero Club. A certificate indicated a candidate had passed the test requirements of the Federation Aeronautique Internationale (FAI), an organization headquartered in Paris, France, whose representative in the United States was the Aero Club. To qualify as an Army aviator, additional training, followed by a more stringent flying test, was required of a candidate. The course led to the award of either a reserve military aviator rating (RMA) for reservists or a military aviator rating (MA) for those in the Regular Army. For a national guardsman to enter the aviation section of the Army, an RMA was necessary.

In the spring of 1916, the Aero Club donated $350 and tuition for both McMillen and Begnell to take flying instruction at the Curtiss company Atlantic Coast Aeronautical Station at Newport News, Virginia. The lieutenant and captain immediately relocated there, and formal training began. Within a month McMillen had completed the course, probably receiving his FAI certificate, and returned to Nebraska to continue exhibition flying as a means to support his dependent mother.[18]

In the meantime Bagnell continued his training. In May he and other volunteers assisted the Aero Club in a concentrated campaign to increase congressional appropriations for the coming year. On May 26, 1916, President Alan R. Hawley of the Aero Club, with the help of the Curtiss Aeroplane Company, had the firm's test pilot fly him non-stop from Sheepshead Bay, New York, to Washington, D.C., in a new Curtiss Twin JN airplane as a publicity stunt. The Twin JN, a twin-engined machine which could be armed, was being promoted as a "battleplane" for the air service to replace inadequate trainer types then in use. At Washington it was placed in charge of Captain Ralph L. Taylor of the Connecticut



In 1916 Nebraska Guardsman Edgar W. (Happy) Bagnell (left) began flying instruction with the Army at Mineola, New York. Others are R. M. Olyphant and D. R. Noyes, New York National Guard, and an Army supply officer named Wheeler. The plane is a Curtiss JN-4. (Courtesy of Air Force Museum)

National Guard, whose instruction was also being financed by the Aero Club. Taylor was assisted by Lieutenant Bagnell for three days in explaining the machine and its capabilities to the public, as well as to Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, other Cabinet members, and many congressmen. The public showing may have been instrumental in increasing the naval aviation appropriation which passed in May at a figure nearly twice that being considered earlier.

On June 3 the National Defense Act of 1916 became law and converted the Organized Militia into the National Guard as we know it today by removing the nine-month limit on federal service imposed by congressional act of 1903. The new law called for reorganization of both the Regular Army and the National Guard to enable guard units to move into federal service without organizational changes that had confused previous conscriptions.

The situation with Mexico had become critical, and President Woodrow Wilson on June 18 ordered the federalized National Guard of many more states to join those of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona on the Mexican border. The Nebraska 4th and 5th Regiments were among those called. The following day Adjutant General Hall wired the Division of Militia Affairs that Captain McMillen had completed his training and Lieutenant Bagnell would finish within the week. He asked if they could be utilized as airmen and if an aero company would be accepted as a separate unit. Thus began Bagnell's long and trying campaign to enter the aviation section of the Army as a national guardsman. His tribulations were typical of those of many others attempting the same thing.[19]

In requests for help from the Aero Club of America and congressmen from the area, Hall mentioned that the Nebraska Aero Company was organized according to War Department directives, and that there were three professional aviators (McMillen, Bagnell, and perhaps Captain Schaffer), five balloon men, and mechanics.[20]

On June 27 General Hall reported that McMillen at the mobilization camp in Lincoln and Lieutenant Bagnell at Newport News were both "qualified as pilots" (indicating the lieutenant's training at the civilian school was complete), though they probably had only their FAI certificates. In addition, the names of the following Nebraskans were supplied as desiring to enter aviation school: Tandy N. Dillon, Ernest R. Wells, William A. Lovelady, Alva N. White, Robert P. Chesney, Fred Bolton, Harley J. Devoe, Leo D. Westover, Joe E. Westover, Fred E. Roberts, Roscoe J. Craig, and Walter T. Hansen. They were probably members of the Nebraska Aviation Corps.

During the next few days wires flew back and forth between Adjutant General William A. Simpson of the Eastern Department, U.S. Army, and General Hall with increased optimism that federalization of the Aero Company was imminent. Lieutenant Bagnell was informed by Hall that he was, in fact, an officer of the Aero Company (a shift in names to suit Army terminology), whose organization was being completed at Lincoln, and to stand by for further orders. On June 29 Simpson advised that all National Guard members at Newport

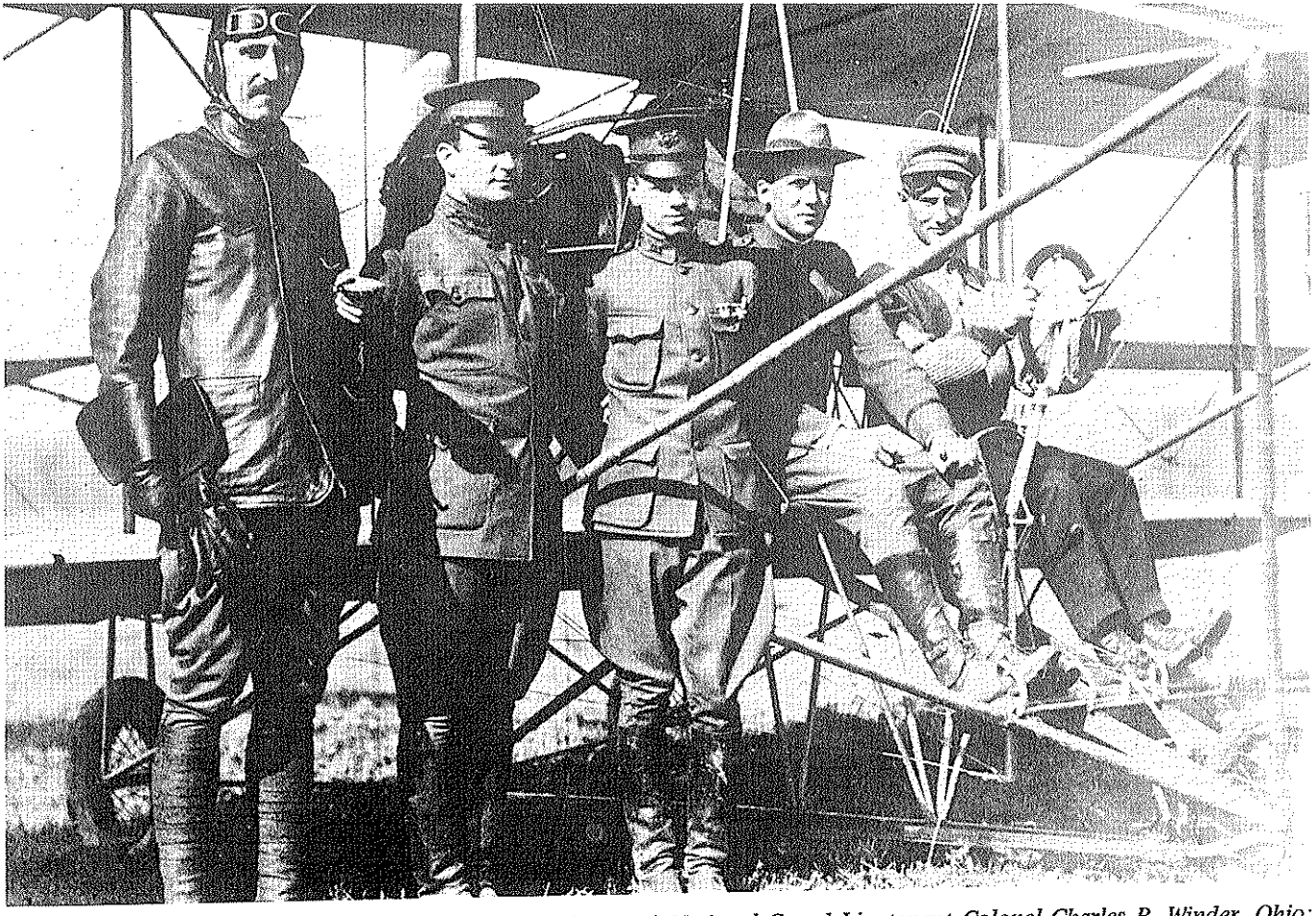
News would be mustered into Army service and would complete their flying instruction there.[21]

On July 2 Hall requested that the Nebraska Aero Company be inspected, mustered into service, and moved to Newport News for training as a unit. The optimisim of the Nebraskans was shattered when they received a communication from the chief of the Militia Bureau in Washington dated July 3, which advised them the Aero Company could not be considered until all the state's units were at full war strength. Since the 4th and 5th Infantry Regiments were only at peace-time level and some units had already left for the border, it was impossible to bring them to the higher figure. It was believed the best solution would be to shift the Aero Company to one of the regiments, thus making it eligible for federal service, and transfer the men to aviation duty later. But this was never done.[22]

Further inquiries elicited the comment from Simpson on July 5 that only McMillen and Bagnell were covered by the orders for mustering into federal service but that Bagnell was *ineligible* because he was not a member of a federally recognized unit (the 4th or 5th Regiments). Proving that the Nebraska National Guard was as adept at circumventing red tape as the Army was in creating it, General Hall on July 7 made Bagnell a quartermaster captain in the 5th Infantry, thus making him a member of a federalized unit and eligible for muster. He entered federal service on July 19 and was ordered to the Army's aviation school at Mineola, New York, for further training.[23]

In the meantime on July 14, Hall attempted to obtain for Captain McMillen an RMA rating by contacting the Aero Club of America and inquiring about the test. The captain had fractured both legs in an accident in 1912, eliminating him physically, and he was not permitted to enter federal service. Instead, he remained in Nebraska, where he continued to earn a living by flying in exhibitions.[24] Still a member of the Nebraska National Guard, he made almost daily trips in his 75 h.p. Curtiss machine in late July under the direction of the adjutant general. On the 23rd he made a spectacular night flight over Lincoln under simulated wartime conditions. While flying in a display at St. Francis, Kansas, on September 2, 1916, Captain McMillen crashed and was killed.[25]

These incidents signified an end to the Nebraska Aero



Pilots training at College Park, Maryland, in 1912. (l. to r.) National Guard Lieutenant Colonel Charles B. Winder, Ohio; Army Lieutenants Leighton W. Hazelhurst, Thomas Milling, and Paul Beck. At the control is Curtiss instructor Charles F. Walsh, civilian, who flew exhibitions in Nebraska before World War I. (Courtesy of U.S. Air Force)

Company, which had never owned an airplane but could claim as many as three qualified pilots on its rolls at its peak. Captain Bagnell, however, continued to represent the Nebraska unit for many more months.

The position of National Guard training at Mineola and the few other Army flying fields was dictated by appropriations, and the picture had changed drastically during the summer months. While the organization by the Army of the National Guard of the states into twelve divisions, each with its own aero squadron, had been approved in 1914, no funds were made available to accomplish the plan. In the spring of 1916, the proposed Army aviation appropriation for fiscal 1917 amounted to $1,222,000 and that for the National Guard only $76,000—enough to purchase only a few airplanes.[26]

When the situation on the Mexican border directed attention to Army deficiencies, the War Department drew up a plan to organize twelve National Guard squadrons and submitted it in June to the Senate. A modified bill was approved that would have made $9,640,800 available for this purpose and $3,440,866 for regular Army squadrons. After a Senate-House committee modified the bill, a total appropriation of $13,281,666 was voted into law on August 29, 1916.[27] It, however, altered the original version which favored the National Guard and included only the original $76,000 for militia aviation units. By so structuring the bill, Congress acknowledged the primary need of the Army for a greatly expanded aviation section, but also ended any immediate chance for reinforcing the National Guard as an aviation reserve. On September 9 the chief of the Militia Bureau advised state governments this money was sufficient to purchase only four airplanes and train only fifty officers over the entire country.[28]

While the bulk of the Nebraska National Guard infantry units were on the border at Llano Grande, Texas, their lone airman moved to Mineola, New York, the Army's only training field on the East Coast. When he arrived, he found to his surprise that the government had just begun operations there on July 22, that Lieutenant Joseph E. Carberry was the only Army officer at the field, and that *no* military airplanes were available. About a week later the first of four Curtiss JN-4 military trainers arrived and the rest were received by the end of September. The

JN-4 was powered by a Curtiss OX-2 engine of 90 h.p. and was a good flying machine for its day. It was of the same type on which Bagnell had trained at Newport News, and later models became known as the "Jennies" of World War I.

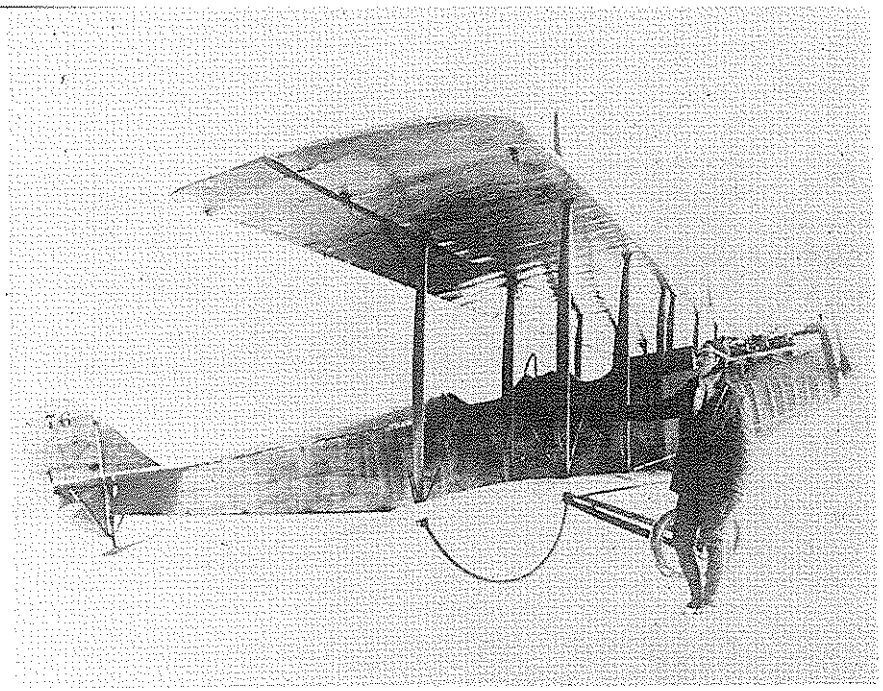
The 1st Aero Company of the New York National Guard had been using this flying field for some time before its muster into federal service on July 13, and a number of hangars lined the flying area. In the first weeks the few guardsmen from other states used the New York unit's trainers as much as they did the two planes the Army had available. Civilian instructors included Overton M. Bounds, H. W. Blakely, and Bertrand B. Acosta. When it became evident that the Army would not be able to support the training program adequately, Colonel Raynal C. Bolling, in charge of the New York unit, obtained $7,500 on loan from the Aero Club and purchased another JN-4 to add to the two the 1st Aero Company already had.[29]

In September the New York 1st Aero Company was augmented by the entire 2nd Aero Company from Buffalo, New York, as well as by ten officers from other states. Included was 2nd Lieutenant Bagnell, his Army commission rank considerably beneath his Nebraska National Guard captaincy. When the reduced appropriation announcement came from the Militia Bureau on September 9, the 2nd Aero Company was disbanded that same day, there being no possibility of state financing for National Guard instruction.[30]

By the end of October, Lieutenant Carberry, the commanding officer at Mineola, had on hand nine Army JN-4 trainers and was able to mount a reasonable training program. Bagnell remained at Mineola during the winter of 1916-1917 and flew many cross-country flights, such as the December 30 trip in which twelve airplanes participated and experimental clothing was used. It was 18 degrees below zero at 6,000 feet where most planes flew, and crewmen nearly froze in open cockpits that allowed wind to whip clear to their feet. There were minor accidents, but the JN-4 piloted by Lieutenant Bagnell flew to Philadelphia and returned without incident.[31]

At the completion of his training, he took flying tests, probably in January, 1917. One was to climb to 500 feet within the bounds of a field 2,000 feet square. In the trial requiring that he cut off his engine at 1,000 feet and land within 200 feet

The Omaha World-Herald *of February 11, 1917, ran a feature article on Lieutenant Edgar W. (Happy or Bobby) Bagnell during a visit to Omaha. A free spirit like so many aviators in pre-World War I years, Bagnell was well known in the National Guard "for his pantomime and mimicry."*



Lieutenant Edgar W. Bagnell trained in an Army Curtiss JN-4 during the winter of 1916-1917 at Mineola, New York. (Courtesy of Air Force Museum)

of a designated point, he stopped within 60 feet. When landing over an obstacle, he traveled only 65 feet in his second attempt, though 1,500 feet were allowed. Other requirements were completed satisfactorily, and Bagnell received a reserve military aviator rating to become a Reserve Corps signal officer and a formal member of the Air Service.[32]

In early February, 1917, Lieutenant Bagnell returned to Lincoln to visit his parents. The border confrontation with Mexico was now no longer explosive, and many National Guard units returned to their states for demobilization. Bagnell was assigned to assist in mustering out the Nebraska 5th Infantry Regiment at Omaha when it returned that same month. Newspaper accounts reported that he was to be assigned either to the Army's 1st Aero Squadron at Columbus, New Mexico, or to the aviation school at San Diego, California.[33] Actually he was ordered to the border, and prior to April 6, when war with Germany was declared, was assigned to the Air Service's newly created 3rd Aero Squadron at San Antonio, Texas. Organization of this unit had begun the previous October, but its build-up had been slow. Only about nine officers were on the rolls when the country entered the war—five of them, like Bagnell, being members of the Signal Officers Reserve Corps.[34] It became an organized squadron in April, was transferred to

Kelly Field, Texas, in May, and to Post Field, Oklahoma, in August, 1917, without seeing overseas service. The total time spent by the Nebraska officer from his first efforts to enter the Air Service to his assignment to this squadron had been eight months.[35]

Lieutenant Bagnell was one of only sixteen National Guardsmen from outside New York state to receive Army pilot certificates in 1916, a minuscule number considering that the country was in its most serious international crisis in 18 years. The entire list of guardsmen trained by the Army prior to the declaration of war and the year in which they were trained follows:

1912
Lt. Col. C. B. Winder, Ohio

1916
Capt. Ralph L. Taylor, Conn.
1st Lt. H. F. Wehrle, W. Va.
1st Lt. Barnard Cummings, Colo.
2d Lt. B. F. Briggs, Wyo.
2d Lt. E. W. Bagnell, Nebr.
1st Lt. Frank W. Wright, Ore.
1st Lt. D. B. Byrd, N. C.
1st Lt. A. J. Coyle, N. H.
2d Lt. B. R. Osborne, Ky.
Sgt. L. V. Smith, Ga.
1st Lt. Henry Ilse, Wash.
2d Lt. Forrest Ward, Ark.
Cpl. B. O. Watkins, Ala.
2d Lt. Dean Smith, N. M.
Capt. W. W. Spain, S. D.
Capt. L. P. Billard, Kan.

1917
1st Lt. James P. Kelly, Unknown
Pvt. James F. Carr, Va.
1st Lt. Ernest Clark, Ind.
2d Lt. E. G. Horigan, Maine[36]

Of these twenty-one officers, two died in accidents during the war: Captain Ralph Taylor of Connecticut on August 2, 1917, and Captain L. P. Billard of Kansas on July 24, 1918. Taylor had been active in efforts to strengthen the aviation arms of both services in 1916 and was stationed at Mineola, New York, probably as an instructor at the time of his death.[37]

The incomplete names of only four other Nebraska guardsmen have been identified as undertaking flying training in this period, none under the Army, and whether three of them received pilot's ratings is not known. In early 1917 Lieutenants Westover* and Boyd were being instructed by the famous woman aviator, Miss Ruth Law of Chicago, but the location of their instruction sessions is unknown. At the same time a Lieutenant Hillburg was in Florida undergoing flight training. Lastly, Captain E. E. Newbold apparently did complete his

* This officer may have been either Leo D. or Joe E. Westover, both guardsmen who hoped to become members of the Nebraska Aviation Corps in June, 1916.

flying instruction after war was declared in April, 1917. However, the Nebraska Aero Company no longer existed and his further flying activities would not have been connected with it.[38]

From the limited number of guardsmen who received Army instruction, it is obvious that the other states fared no better than Nebraska. Only New York had a complete aero squadron organized, yet it was equipped with only four trainers at its peak. Michigan, for example, obtained one L.W.F. airplane in 1916, but when it was damaged in an accident the state could not afford to repair it. Later it was sold to the Army by the factory where it was being restored.

National Guard aviation did not really become effective until federal funds became available in ample amounts in the 1920's. While the experiences during World War I were unfortunate, they were dictated by temporary circumstances, and the Air National Guard in the next decade was finally able to take its place in supporting federal military aviation. Pioneer airmen Captain Ralph E. McMillen of Nebraska, Captain Ralph L. Taylor of Connecticut, and L. P. Billard of Kansas, did not live to see this transition.

NOTES

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2. Headquarters, Department of the Army, *American Military History 1607-1958*, ROTC Manual 145-20 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), 329.
3. Adjutant General of the State of Nebraska, *Bicentennial Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Nebraska for 1913-1914* (Lincoln, 1914), 31.
4. Adjutant General of the State of Nebraska, *Biennial Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Nebraska for 1915-1916* (Lincoln, 1916) (hereinafter cited as *Biennial Report 1915-1916*), 387-388.
5. *Ibid.*, 74-76.
6. *Ibid.*, 152, 387-388.
7. *Ibid.*, 67-68.

8. Nebraska National Guard, *Historical Annual–National Guard of the State of Nebraska, 1939* (Lincoln: Nebraska National Guard, ca. 1939).

9. *Biennial Report 1915-1916*, 68-69.

10. *Ibid.*, 26-28.

11. *Ibid.*, 384.

12. *Ibid.*, 26-28, 30, 35.

13. *Ibid.*, 26-28, 384.

14. *Ibid.*, 40-41; 387-388.

15. *Ibid.*, 33, 43-44.

16. *Ibid.*, 384, 387-388.

17. Tompkins, 221-223.

18. *Biennial Report, 1915-1916*, 387-388.

19. Casari, Robert B., *Encyclopedia of U.S. Military Aircraft, Pt. I, 1908 to April 6, 1917* (Chillicothe, Ohio: Robert B. Casari, 1974), Vol. 4, 74; Tompkins, 221-223; *Biennial Report, 1915-1916*, 151, 186-187.

20. *Ibid.*, 136-137.

21. *Ibid.*, 140-141.

22. *Ibid.*, 142-145, 185.

23. *Ibid.*, 142-145, 151, 185.

24. *Ibid.*, 142-145, 148-150.

25. *Ibid.*, 148-150; *Aerial Age Weekly*, August 7, 1916, 628; *Biennial Report 1915-1916*, 387-388.

26. *Aerial Age Weekly*, July 17, 1916, 525-526; June 26, 1916, 437.

27. *Ibid.*, July 10, 1916, 501; July 17, 1916, 525-526.

28. War Dept. Bulletin No. 33, September 9, 1916; Jones, Ernest L., *Chronology of the Air Service*, August 29, 1916, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

29. Casari, Vol. 4, 9-13; Tompkins, 221-223.

30. *Biennial Report, 1915-1916*, 142-145.

31. Casari, Vol. 4, 18; Hennessy, Julliette A., *The United States Army Air Arm, April 1861 to April 1917*, USAF Historical Studies: No. 98 (Montgomery, Alabama: Air University, Research Studies Institute, USAF Historical Division, 1958) (hereinafter Historical Studies No. 98), 179-180.

32. *Historical Studies No. 98*, 246-248; *Omaha Sunday Bee*, February 4, 1917, 10B.

33. *Omaha Sunday Bee*, February 4, 1917, 10B.

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36. *Historical Studies No. 98*, 179-180.

37. *Ibid.*; Casari, Vol. 4, 33.

38. *Omaha Sunday Bee*, February 4, 1917, 10B; Historical Studies No. 98, 246-248.