

TWO NOTED PURSUIT PILOTS LOSE THEIR LIVES

"Friday, the 13th," considered by those superstitiously inclined as the prize "Jinx" of them all, apparently gained more adherents among the flying fraternity, as on that day, in January, one of the best Pursuit pilots in the Air Corps, Captain Hugh M. Elmendorf, lost his life while flight-testing a new type of two-seater Pursuit plane in the vicinity of Patterson Field, Fairfield, Ohio. Then, as if this accident was not sufficient to paint Friday in colors of the darkest hue, another distressing accident occurred on January 20th, when another outstanding Pursuit pilot in Air Corps circles, 1st Lieut. Irvin A. Woodring, flight-testing the same type of ship but adapted for Attack use, crashed approximately four miles from Wright Field and was instantly killed. The death of these two popular officers was a great shock to the Air Corps.

Fate at times plays a mysterious hand in the lives of the mortals of this world. The fortunes of Captain Elmendorf and Lieut. Woodring were strangely intermingled during their service in the Air Corps. The latter was a protege of the former while both served with the 95th Pursuit Squadron at Rockwell Field, Coronado, Calif. Both met their death on a Friday and both piloted the same type of airplane on their last flight. Prior to Captain Elmendorf's death, the most serious airplane accident which befell him during his career as an Air Corps pilot occurred at Selfridge Field, Mich., on July 14, 1927. He had no sooner made a landing in a P-1 Pursuit plane when a Transport plane, piloted by Lieut. Woodring who was just taking off, collided with it. At that particular time, Lieut. Woodring was being instructed in piloting a Transport plane by the late Lieut. DeClaire D. Schulze. The left wing of the Transport slid up along the fuselage of Captain Elmendorf's plane, striking him on the top of his head and crashing him down in the cockpit. Captain Elmendorf sustained a very serious injury to his back, and was confined at Walter Reed Hospital for an extended period. He eventually recovered from his injuries and continued his brilliant exploits as a Pursuit pilot, but there were some who expressed grave doubts if he would recover from a recurring injury to his back.

Again fate figured in a near tragedy in the lives of these two Pursuit pilots on April 23, 1930, during the Air Corps Maneuvers at Sacramento, Calif. They were engaged in a "dog fight" as part of a program arranged in honor of the citizens of Sacramento, when Lieut. Woodring was seen to shoot out of his ship. He fell a hundred feet or so, according to witnesses, and then his parachute opened and he drifted down to terra firma a full fledged member of the Caterpillar Club. According to Woodring's report of his jump, his plane started in a spin out of control, and he realized that a crash was inevitable. He loosened his safety belt at about a thousand feet and was immediately catapulted into space.

On the day Captain Elmendorf was flight-testing the new type of two-seater Pursuit ship, he had with him as Observer Captain Frank O'D. Hunter. Both officers had been at Wright Field for a week testing the plane in order to decide upon its suitability for adoption by the Air Corps for service use. Captain Hunter, already a Second Degree member of the Caterpillar Club, realized his peril when the plane started on its downward course and managed to jump with his parachute. His Third Degree initiation was fraught with just as much hazard as his other two and, due to the low altitude of the plane at the time he left it, he was severely injured. According to reports recently received from the hospital where he is confined, he is doing well.

Captain Elmendorf was one of the outstanding officers of the Air Corps, one who was especially skilled in Pursuit Aviation. When Captain Hunter was relieved from duty in the Training and Operations Division, Office of the Chief of the Air Corps, as Pursuit aviation representative, Captain Elmendorf succeeded him in that position. He was born at Ithaca, N.Y., on January 3, 1895, and graduated from Cornell University in that city. During the World War he was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant, Infantry O.R.C., August 15, 1917; promoted Provisional 1st Lieut of Infantry, February 9, 1918, and Provisional Captain of Infantry, October 28, 1918. He served

at Camp Greene, N.C., until April, 1918, when he was transferred to the Infantry School at Camp Benning, Ga., as an instructor. On March 10, 1921, he was transferred to the Air Corps and, after completing the primary flying course at Carlstrom Field, Arcadia, Fla., and the advanced flying course at Ellington Field, Houston, Texas, he was rated a Pursuit pilot on December 7, 1921. He served with the First Pursuit Group at Ellington Field and then at Selfridge Field, Mich. After a three-year tour of duty in the Hawaiian Department, he returned to Selfridge Field and assumed command of the 94th Pursuit Squadron.

Upon his return to duty following his recovery from his accident in July, 1927, at Selfridge Field, Captain Elmendorf was assigned to the command of the 95th Pursuit Squadron at Rockwell Field, Calif. While in command of this organization, he developed Pursuit tactics at extremely high altitudes, leading his entire squadron in maneuvers at an altitude of 28,500 feet over Mather Field, Sacramento, Calif. In September, 1930, he was transferred to Washington to duty in the Training and Operations Division, Office of the Chief of the Air Corps, swapping jobs, as it were, with Captain Hunter who, upon his arrival at Rockwell Field, assumed command of the 95th Pursuit Squadron. Captain Elmendorf was recognized throughout the Air Corps as an exceptionally well qualified aerial gunner. In 1927, in the Annual Machine Gun and Bombing Matches at Langley Field, Va., he captured the Pursuit Pilots' Match with the score of 902.1 out of a possible score of 1525. This score was the highest obtained in this particular match from the beginning of the Matches in 1926 up to last September, when 2nd Lieut. Winslow C. Morse scored 1014 points, although it should be noted that the highest possible score in that match in 1933 was raised to 1750.

Captain Elmendorf was buried at the Arlington National Cemetery on Monday, January 16th, 1933. Planes from Bolling Field flew over the grave during the last rites. The pallbearers were Captains William J. Flood, Harlan W. Holden, Edwin J. House, Charles L. Cummings, Major Asa N. Duncan and Lieut. H.A. Halverson.