

# Our Army Air Corps Chief

by JAMES FARBER

Major General Benjamin Foulois, Chief of the U. S. Army Air Corps, is an old-timer in aviation, a practical pilot and mechanic. In short, he knows his stuff. He was our first Army pilot, and for a long time, was the only pilot.

ONCE upon a time, generals used to wave their swords and lead their men to the roaring cannon's muzzle. Indeed, a land engagement that was not marked by the fatally reckless courage of a high ranking officer was counted as hardly more than a skirmish. The casualty lists were filled with men who had won their spurs, medals and high ranks by personal daring in battle.

That wasn't so long ago. Our own Civil War left many a general dead on the battlefield. The Spanish-American war took its toll of men wearing stars and eagles on their shoulder straps. But time, customs and habits change. So does war-making, as the World War demonstrated. Today, generals direct battles from swivel chairs and off maps. Brains rather than bravery are required of leaders.

And a leader who combines brains with an intrepid spirit of daredevilry is a rarity today. A man who directs his men—then leads them in the field—must be a personality among fighting men. It is a great pleasure to introduce a man like that to you. He is Maj. Gen. Benjamin D. Foulois, Chief of the U. S. Army Air Corps!

He was commander of the A.E.F. air forces in France. Yet he rode roaring planes through European battle skies. He plans maneuvers for the army birdmen—and flies anyplace and everyplace—all alone or at the thundering head of his men. He is a hard-bitten hard-flying pilot of the toughest fiber and the highest caliber. He sets a "hell-of-a-pace" for his "boys" to follow—in one of the most hazardous arms of the service.

Unlike many modern-day generals, Foulois may go down at the head of his squadrons if his country is plunged into war again. But that is probably the way he would choose. He is a fighter through and through.

But let's get a closeup picture of this diminutive chief of our Air Corps. No better way than to accept his word for it that he prefers to be thought of as "Benny" Foulois!

What a remarkable feeling for a general officer to have. And what a tribute to his human side—"Benny." He knows everyone calls him that anyway, but he says it delights him. He doesn't growl through a general's legendary mustachios—not only because he doesn't wear mustachios as you probably know,—or could find out by examining the accompanying photos—but because it is not his nature to growl. You'd have to make him good and mad to get him in a bad humor and then his chief manifestation of ill humor is to

bite his pipe and chew it with a clicking noise. Then he's a tough and wily adversary.

As boss of the Army Air Corps, it is Foulois' job to be in intimate touch with the several dozen army fields strategically scattered over the nation. He could travel 10,000 miles by air and still have a few more posts to visit.

Saddled with the prodigious task of directing the air mail, he says he expects to add about 20,000 miles a year to his travels. His present yearly average is 40,000. Since he doesn't believe in delegating his own duties to



A wartime closeup of Major General Foulois, then a brigadier general. He accomplished important tasks in France.

his assistants, he has an enormous job to do getting around the country on inspection tours and official visits. As Chief, he holds himself personally responsible for the maintenance of the service ideals of the corps.

His log-book shows that, after he succeeded Maj. Gen. James Fechet as air corps chief in July, 1931, he soloed 235 hours in the first year of his tenure of office. That was only a beginning. In the second year, ending July, 1933, he hung up a score of 310 hours. Nobody can guess what he will do as the nation's premier Flying General and Flying Postman as well!

If you are a reader of the daily papers you must have often come across a paragraph such as this:—

"... Foulois, chief of the U. S. Army Corps, landed at Military Airport today. He told newspaper men just before taking off that he expected to be at Corps Field, 300 miles away, by nightfall."

If you think anybody but Foulois was flying Foulois' plane, you've got another guess coming. Benny is his own pilot and mechanic. The spare cockpit in his plane is invariably empty. He won't have it any other way—and he's the boss. It is a source of great pride with him that nobody can say he is a chauffeured general.

As a matter of fact, since he has been in office, there has been a decided jump in the number of flying hours credited to his higher ranking subordinates. It is his firm conviction that his officers can not properly understand their jobs without putting in plenty of flight hours. He frankly admits that his own strenuous activities are meant to furnish an example for them. He says leadership and knowledge of flying equipment are the best basic qualities of military pilots.

When Benny takes off from Washington for San Francisco—with stop-offs—his usual time is a day and a half. His speed average for that 310 hour mark of his was between 130 and 140 miles an hour. He likes to take about a thousand miles at a jump—or a jump-and-a-half—say, about 7 hours, or long enough for him to begin to think about his gas supply.

His greatest bugbear, he says, is the mountain of official paper work that frequently engulfs him in his Washington office. This is not only his bugbear, but it is his despair. Sometimes he is hopelessly swamped and can't brush off on a tour of the country.

"I itch to get into the air at these times," he says. "Flying is my best recreation, but if you don't think I like handball, just come over and watch me! But I find my best relaxation in my plane."

The minute he sees a loophole in the wall of paper that surrounds him, he races off to Bolling field and is off again on one of his famous sprints across the country. He will jump up from his desk at 10 o'clock in the morning and four hours later slip into Wright Field or some other post for a little visit. If the press of paper duties doesn't recall him to his headquarters, the 500-mile hop is likely enough to end on the California slope.

He never really surprises the enlisted men of the corps by these sudden descents into their midst. They have learned to expect such unexpected and



informal visits. They are always glad to see him. He probably knows more enlisted men by their first names than any other general in the army.

For that matter, they all know him by his first name, too, so to speak. He is universally and affectionately known as "Benny" wherever flying men gather. He knows this and it "tickles" him. He was an enlisted man once, himself. He knows their problems and their viewpoints. That's why he has their unanimous and enthusiastic loyalty.

Although enlisted men do not address him as "Benny," some of the old timers that he fought side-by-side with him in the Philippines and elsewhere on far-flung battle fronts, still call him "Lieutenant." They can't seem to get over the habit, he says, and he gets a big "kick" out of it.

Benny uses an observation plane known as the O-38-F. It is a two-seater capable of a high speed of 160 m.p.h. With a stiff tail wind of course, he can be blown along his course at a much livelier clip. But he chose this particular ship for its maneuverability, its six-hour gas capacity and its excellent landing and takeoff speeds. He says:

"With that ship o' mine I can get in and out of any airport in the country without any trouble at all. And believe me, I need to some times. Once I hit one of those thunderstorms that afe always popping up in the southwest. I decided the best thing in this case would be to fly right in its teeth, so I did. I had quite a time of it. Got so bad I guessed I'd better make for the nearest piece of flat ground. Finally landed in a racetrack near Muskogee, Texas. I certainly needed a ship that could land in a spot like that."

Benny is a "first" and a "last" figure in American aviation. He was the first United States army flyer. In fact, there was a time when he was the sole member of the Army air service. That was back in 1910.

And he is a "last" in that he is the last of the old timers of military flying to be pursuing the same profession. Those early ones have passed on, or retired or found posts in civil life. Benny flies on and expects to keep on until they make him quit . . . which will probably be a tough job. A law will probably have to be passed to make that come to pass.

Curiously enough, Benny originally had no intention of joining the army. His first ideas led him to apply to the navy. It came about in this way:—

Born and raised in Washington, Conn., Benny could have had a share in

his father's prosperous plumbing business. But commercial life had little or no appeal for him. He wasn't sure what he wanted to do, but the Navy seemed to offer many advantages to a likely lad, so:

Benny ran away from home!

He made for New York and thence to Brooklyn. At the Navy Yard he confronted a recruiting officer. Said the officer:

"Can you box the compass?"

Said Benny: "No."

"Can you heave the lead?"

"No." Then quoth the officer:

"We're not enlisting landsmen." Just like that, he says, chuckling over the recollection. That was in 1897. He decided to return home. At the depot

plied with the same two embarrassing questions. The Navy was still "enlisting no landsmen." So that was that.

Woefully, Benny wandered up Broadway. At 14th Street where Union Square cuts a wide swath in New York's gayest thoroughfare, he saw the alluring poster of the First Volunteer Engineers. It dazzled him. Why hadn't he thought of the army before?

So the Navy's loss 36 years ago became the Army's gain today.

It was Benny Foulois who engineered the organization, legislation and expenditure of the \$640,000,000 air-service appropriation after America entered the war in 1917. In July of that year he was promoted to the rank of brigadier general and sent to France to organize the shops, depots and service of supply of the A.E.F. flying force.

It was a mammoth undertaking but not too big for the man assigned to it. He got American equipment for American flyers, coordinated and dovetailed the separate units and formed the nucleus for the strong fighting organization in the air that was eventually developed.

Meanwhile, he was everywhere at once. He often dropped in on the Lafayette Escadrille—which he had managed to get transferred from the French air service—and swapped yarns with Thaw, Rockwell, Soubiran and others who had made and were still making aerial history.

He spent all the time he could in the actual theater of operations and heard plenty of bullets whistling past his ears. His only worry was that of a possible official reprimand for endangering the life of an Air Corps general—his own!

He says too much stress is laid on the horrors of the next war. All war is horrible. It hasn't changed much in that respect, he says, and believes the words ascribed to General Sherman can hardly be improved upon.

Although it is a far cry back to those days when he was the one-man air-service of the United States Army, Benny Foulois recalls those early experiences with something like gusto. He is vastly amused at the way he got started in the flying service.

Although he had never seen an airplane, young Foulois, graduating from the Army Signal School at Ft. Leavenworth, Kan., wrote a thesis about flying machines. Not only was it a lively and timely discussion of their future, but it was a treatise on their tactical and

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"It was Benny Foulois who engineered the organization, legislation and expenditure of the \$640,000,000 air-service appropriation after America entered the war in 1917." LEFT TO RIGHT. Lieut. A. B. Thaw, Jr., Major Ralph Royce and Major General Benjamin Foulois, then Brigadier General.

he was met by most of the population of the town. He was the first runaway in a generation! Maybe it was his introduction to celebrity. Certain it is that he accepted his role and enjoyed it to the utmost.

When war was declared in April, 1898, Benny could contain himself no longer. He armed himself with his brother's birth certificate—"just in case"—and set out on a bicycle for New York, determined to have another try at the Navy. At Brooklyn, where he arrived the same day, he was met by the same dour recruiting officer and



## Barter & Exchange

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HAVE 17-J. wristwatch, field glasses, guitar, telescope, etc., and some cash. Want typewriter or .22 target pistols.—Geo. Dubek, 81 Chestnut St., Garfield, N. J.

WANTED to exchange: Brand new genuine leather helmet and new non-shatterable goggles. What am I offered?—Frank Bidwell, Jr., 1035 Fulton St., Palo Alto, Calif.

TRADE for anything: 13 back numbers Popular Mechanics, 9 National Geographics and Home Builders Catalog for 1929, then priced at \$10.—John Elliott, 1116 Bingham, Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.

WANTED—December, 1930, April, May, July, November, 1931, Flying Aces. Also October, 1931, Sky Birds.—Stephen Melnyk, 160 Isabell St., Johnson City, N. Y.

WANTED—To exchange, World War Aircraft relics and photos.—Wm. J. Boylhart, 86 Huron Road, Bellerose, L. I., N. Y.

AMBITIOUS young man of 19 willing to work hard anywhere, in exchange for board and flying instructions and further advancement. Am 5.3 tall—115 lbs.—Not much, in a way, but "buzzards," just give me a chance.—A. J. Russo, Winnemere Ave., Burlington, Mass.

YOUNG man of 19 (high school graduate), will do anything honorable in exchange for aviation training and flying instruction. Have had preliminary training. Can furnish best of references.—Kenneth R. Drew, Route No. 1, Junction City, Oregon.

WANTED—English Riding Boots, size 10½. Will trade Hampden watch, 17-jewel.—Orville Bolstad, Northwood, N. D.

I WILL TRADE 9 issues of Aero Digest, April to December, 1932, inclusive, for Cleveland model plans.—J. Dettis, 544 Bellanca Ave., Pittsburgh, Pa.

WELDING TORCH, Smith, standard size with tip assortment. Want light airplane welding torch.—J. E. Williams, Y. M. C. A., Charles City, Iowa.

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## Gen. Foulois

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strategic value. Such a profound work had never been seen before by the Washington military graybeards. And it was profound, too, as other flying men will tell you today.

The military moguls were vastly impressed and ordered the youngster to the capital for duty with the Signal Corps. The famous contract with Orville and Wilbur Wright had been drawn up and the Army possessed a flying machine to study and test and, as Benny himself puts it "to fool around with."

Lieuts. Humphries and Lahm were assigned, with Foulois, to be the principal actors in this "fooling around" process. Then, the War Department transferred the former two officers to other duties and told Foulois to take the Army's Pride-and-Joy, the Wright biplane, to Texas for further experimentation.

So Foulois went to Texas as the United States Army air force! He had had exactly an hour and a half to his credit in flying time—and that as a passenger observing the intricate method of operating a flying machine. But orders were orders. Benny built himself a hangar on the Texas desert and resolutely, if gingerly, took his plane aloft for a trial spin.

There were so many difficulties, especially after a crackup, that he concluded the best way of getting to know these contraptions was to ask the Wright brothers. After all, it was their idea and they ought to know something about it.

That's the origin of the story that Benny Foulois learned to fly by taking correspondence courses. Which is, of course, just what he did. After each voluminous report from Dayton, where the brothers were busy building more planes, Benny patiently wheeled his ship out on the sand dune and applied the principles being written to him. The Wrights left nothing to chance in their explanations; the result was that Benny Foulois became a pilot of no mean ability.

He is among the few pilots that have no superstitions. Lighting three cigarettes on a match holds no terrors for him. He explains that, back in the days when he was busy fighting the Moros, he learned that they had a saying that "what will be, will be." This, he explains, was a great factor in his life. It prepared him with a ready-made but highly effective philosophy

that has prepared him for his life's work more than any other teaching he has run across. He does not believe in too much discussion of accidents in flying. Not that this a superstition, he explains. It is simply not conducive to the highest morale and courage so necessary in flying.

Although he is abstemious in his personal habits, there is one notable exception. His pipe. It is always with him. He doesn't smoke in planes because the Air Corps does not encourage its pilots to do so, even in fireproof ones. But he isn't on the ground five minutes before he has his old briar brewing a cloud of invigorating smoke.

He doesn't even have to fish around in his clothes for it. He usually carries it in his mouth while flying and the harder the flying, the harder he bites it. He doesn't know how many pipes he uses up in a year. But he prefers gnawing on the briar stem to chewing gum while up in the clouds, although he admits he occasionally changes—but only for an hour or two.

The day that Wilbur Wright met Foulois the latter was, as usual, emitting great clouds of smoke from his pipe. Everyplace he went the pipe went along, protruding from its owner's lips at a rakish angle. Finally the great pioneer turned to a group of government officials and army officers accompanying the two on the inspection tour, and remarked:

"A man who smokes a pipe like Foulois does, will never make a flyer."

There is a twinkle in Benny's eyes as he tells this.

This mild mannered, blue-eyed, diminutive Chief of the Air Corps, its celebrated Flying General—perhaps one of the first in history—doesn't look much like a daredevil. But then what daredevil—except Roscoe Turner—does?

END.

## Airy Chat

(Continued from page 286)

WE have had so many demands for the address of an engine builder who produces a low-priced 50 h.p. light-plane engine that we heartily wish such a man or company will show up at an early date.

\* \* \*

A BIG argument was started the other day in our office by an old-timer and a new-comer on the threadbare subject of pusher engines versus tractor engines. Said the new-comer, "Yes, but then there is always the danger of having the pusher-engine falling down on your neck." Said the old-timer, "Mebbe so, but I just as soon have a pusher engine on my neck as a tractor engine in my lap," and so the matter ended. What is your preference?

\* \* \*

JUST across the alley from my home is a spotted pointer dog. This dog specializes, much to everyone's amuse-

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