

Flying Machines and War Bonds

The Victory Loan Flying Circus in South Dakota

"I have had the time of my life!" exclaimed Beryl Grantham, after the Curtiss "Jenny" biplane that had taken the young woman aloft for half an hour landed safely at Melgaard Park in Aberdeen on 24 April 1919. According to that evening's edition of the *Aberdeen Daily News*, Grantham's face "beamed with pleasure and excitement." Her pilot, Second Lieutenant Harry C. Roberts of the United States Army Air Service, had just executed various loops, a nose dive, several different kinds of rolls, and other aerobatic maneuvers.¹ At least thirteen more South Dakotans received similarly thrilling rides during military aviation exhibitions held in Aberdeen, Redfield, and Sioux Falls on 24, 25, and 26 April. Army officers estimated the combined attendance at the three South Dakota air shows at over thirty-six thousand people. According to the 1920 census, the combined population of Sioux Falls and Aberdeen, then the state's two largest cities, was just under forty thousand.²

The author thanks Franklin O. Carroll of Custer, South Dakota, grandson of Mid-West Flight pilot First Lieutenant Franklin O. Carroll, for providing most of the photographs that accompany this article. He also supplied a copy of his grandfather's flight logs, which record the lieutenant's forty-five-minute flight in a SPAD VII during the Victory Loan Flying Circus air show in Redfield on 25 April 1919 and his thirty-five-minute flight over Sioux Falls on 26 April 1919.

1. *Aberdeen Daily News*, 24 Apr. 1919.

2. *Aberdeen Daily American*, 25 Apr. 1919; War Diary, Victory Loan Mid-West Flight (hereafter cited as War Diary), sheets 27, 29, 31, Records of the Army Air Forces, Record Group (RG) 18, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md. (hereafter NARA-CP); U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920*, 12 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 9:1401.



Beryl Grantham (second from right) was one of at least five civilians who rode aloft with the Victory Loan Flying Circus during the group's stop in Aberdeen. Grantham and several unidentified women are pictured here with Captains Anthony Beauchamp-Proctor (left) and Thomas C. Traill (right) of the British Royal Air Force.

While the air shows of April 1919 created considerable excitement and drew spectators for many miles around the three South Dakota host cities, the army did not stage the events merely for entertainment purposes. Less than six months earlier, American airmen had been locked in combat with their German adversaries in the skies over France while their comrades in the infantry struggled to survive on the battlefields below. The so-called "Great War" that ended in November 1918, known to later generations as World War I, had been the most expensive conflict (in financial terms) in American history up to that time. The federal government had borrowed vast sums of money to support the war effort, and in the spring of 1919, it needed another infusion of funds to meet its obligations as the nation transitioned back to a state of peace.³ Thus, the military aviators who visited South Da-

3. Labert St. Clair, *The Story of the Liberty Loans* (Washington, D.C.: James William Bryan Press, 1919), pp. 80, 89.

kota in 1919 did so to drum up public support for a bond drive known as the Victory Loan campaign.

Soon after the United States entered World War I on 6 April 1917, it began financing its military efforts through the sale of bonds. The total cost of the war to the federal government from this date to 30 June 1919 was almost \$30.2 billion. By comparison, “normal” federal spending during this period amounted to about \$2.25 billion. The United States expended approximately \$19 billion for the war effort in 1918, the year in which American forces did most of their fighting. Considering this country’s late entrance into World War I, the financial burden borne by allied nations from 1 August 1914 to 18 March 1919 offers a surprising contrast between their costs and those of the United States. For example, American expenditures were three-fourths the size of Great Britain’s total war spending (about \$40.6 billion) and one-fourth larger than the debt of France (approximately \$23.4 billion), almost twice as large as the debt of Italy (\$16 billion), and fifteen times the war debt of Canada (\$2 billion). The total yearly spending for all national governments engaged in World War I jumped from \$10 billion in 1914 to \$70 billion in 1918. Most combatant nations paid for the war through borrowing. Only the United States and Great Britain made serious attempts to raise a significant portion of the needed funds through taxation, and even these countries relied on borrowing for over three-fourths of their war spending.⁴

On 24 April 1917, Congress passed the First Liberty Loan Act. Under this legislation, subscribers could purchase government securities in denominations ranging from fifty dollars to one hundred thousand dollars. Although the great majority of individual subscribers purchased small denomination bonds, the bulk of the actual loan proceeds were raised from corporations and the wealthier classes. Congress passed the Second through Fourth Liberty Loan Acts on 1 October 1917, 5 April 1918, and 28 September 1918, respectively. The dollar amount of each bond issue, as well as the interest rates, maturity dates, and federal tax exemptions on bond principal and interest, varied in each loan act

4. Ibid., p. 154; Hew Strachan, *Financing the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 115.

as officials tried to coax the working and middle classes into greater financial participation in the war effort.⁵

Early Liberty Bond sales problems prompted Secretary of the Treasury William Gibbs McAdoo to recommend higher interest rates and more favorable tax terms in subsequent bond issues. McAdoo also orchestrated an aggressive campaign to popularize the bonds. The government recruited talented artists to draw posters, and movie stars such as Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, and Mary Pickford hosted bond rallies. The publicity campaign depicted bond purchases as a patriotic duty. McAdoo, however, resigned from his office on 15 December 1918, not long after the fighting stopped on 11 November. The Fourth Liberty Loan campaign had officially opened on 28 September and closed on 19 October. By that point, Liberty Bond sales had raised almost \$17 billion for the government's war effort.⁶

McAdoo's successor as secretary of the treasury, Carter Glass, oversaw the fifth and final World War I bond campaign, called the "Victory Liberty Loan" or simply "Victory Loan." Released on 21 April and closed on 10 May 1919, this bond issue consisted of \$4.5 billion in securities offered at two different rates of interest. One class of bonds at 3.75 percent interest was exempt from all federal taxation except estate and inheritance taxes, while notes bearing 4.75 percent interest featured somewhat less generous tax concessions. The bonds were scheduled to mature in four years, although they could be redeemed at face value plus accrued interest on 15 June or 15 December 1922, with four months' notice.⁷

Although Secretary Glass and his staff were located in Washington, D.C., the twelve Federal Reserve districts across the nation organized the bond-sales work. South Dakota was in the Ninth Federal Reserve District, with headquarters in Minneapolis. Every state had a quota of bonds to sell, and each county in South Dakota had its own Victory

5. St. Clair, *Story of the Liberty Loans*, pp. 41, 46, 61, 65; Strachan, *Financing the First World War*, pp. 154–58.

6. Ibid, pp. 14, 105, 185–86; Jerry W. Markham, *From J. P. Morgan to the Institutional Investor (1900–1970)*, vol. 2 of *A Financial History of the United States* (Aramonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), pp. 76–78.

7. St. Clair, *Story of the Liberty Loans*, p. 186.

Loan committee. South Dakota filled its entire sales quota, accounting for \$22.5 million of the approximately \$157.5 million in Victory Loan bonds allotted to the Ninth District. The state placed thirty-second in Victory Loan sales among today's fifty states and the District of Columbia (Alaska and Hawaii were still territories at the time).⁸

Given that South Dakota was then the thirty-seventh most populous state, its people bought more than their share of Victory Loan bonds. In fact, South Dakota citizens subscribed for over \$24.8 million in these securities, but the Treasury Department decided not to allow states to exceed their sales quotas in the Victory Loan drive. South Dakota had met its sales target for the first Liberty Loan and exceeded its quotas for the remaining three Liberty Loan issues even though each oversubscription contributed to higher sales goals for subsequent campaigns. South Dakota's allotment in the First Liberty Loan was just under \$3.9 million. The state's Second Liberty Loan allotment was \$12 million, with subscriptions reported at over \$12.6 million. Its Third Liberty Loan quota of \$22 million was no obstacle to success, with over \$31.4 million in sales. Even with a Fourth Liberty Loan allotment of \$31 million, South Dakotans exceeded their state's goal by almost seventeen percent, purchasing just under \$36.3 million in securities.⁹

Persuading the American people to purchase the needed amounts of war bonds had been a large undertaking that used vast amounts of promotional material. The Victory Loan drive utilized captured German war materiel, as well. For example, the Treasury Department produced medallions made from melted-down German cannon seized by American troops at the battle of Château-Thierry in 1918. The department awarded the medals, which were about the size of a half-dollar coin, to Victory Loan campaign volunteers in appreciation for their service.¹⁰

On 17 March 1919, five weeks before the Aberdeen air show, the Treasury Department announced plans to send three "flying circuses" on tour to promote Victory Loan bond sales nationwide. The operation was to begin on 10 April and end on 10 May 1919. Each of the three

8. Ibid., pp. 31–32, 94; Joseph Mills Hanson, *South Dakota in the World War, 1917–1919* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society, 1940), pp. 73–80.

9. Ibid., pp. 78–79; St. Clair, *Story of the Liberty Loans*, p. 186.

10. *Official U.S. Bulletin* (Washington, D.C.), 7 Mar. 1919.



The Victory Loan Flying Circus featured tangible reminders that the United States and its allies had won the First World War. Each of the three touring groups included captured German aircraft, such as this Fokker D.VII fighter.

aerial demonstration teams was assigned to a specific area of the country, designated as the Eastern, Middle-West, and Far West regions. The War Department was to provide eighteen aircraft for each touring group together with the necessary pilots and ground crews. The official Treasury Department announcement read, in part, “The greatest flying program the United States has ever witnessed will be offered in connection with the coming Victory Liberty loan. Demonstration of the flying art as developed above the battlefields of Europe will be given to approximately 50 of the leading American cities by aces of the United States, France and England.”¹¹

The aerial demonstration team that visited South Dakota as part of the 1919 Victory Loan campaign was known as the Mid-West Flight, or Flying Circus No. 2. The group operated under the direction of the Army Air Service, a predecessor of today’s United States Air Force. Only after World War II would the air force emerge as a distinct branch of the military establishment with a status equal to that of the army

11. *Ibid.*, 17 Mar. 1919.

and navy. Prior to reaching South Dakota, Flying Circus No. 2 had performed in cities such as Memphis, Little Rock, Saint Louis, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis.¹²

The original exhibition schedule printed in the 17 March 1919 edition of the *Official U.S. Bulletin*, a government-sponsored newspaper published during the war years, had listed only nineteen Midwest air shows—with none in South Dakota. The War Department added more events and issued a revised schedule on 29 March. The new timetable listed Pierre as the only South Dakota city to be visited, with the train carrying the Mid-West Flight scheduled to arrive at 6:30 p.m. on 24 April for a show the next day. The War Department's exhibition plans

12. John C. Fredriksen, *The United States Air Force: A Chronology* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2011), p. 166; War Diary, sheets 6, 8, 10, 16, 22.



The Mid-West Flight of the Victory Loan Flying Circus covered fourteen states, starting from Houston, Texas, and traveling as far north as Grand Forks, North Dakota, before visiting South Dakota. Map by author

evidently changed again in April. Major O. M. Baldinger provided an itinerary that listed exhibitions in Aberdeen, Pierre, and Sioux Falls to the mother of a member of the ground crew in a letter dated 14 April 1919.¹³

When the flying circus actually visited South Dakota, however, it eliminated the Pierre show in favor of a performance at Redfield. This decision may have been made partly for logistical reasons. The group ordered replacement engines and wing panels for some of its aircraft from an army supply depot in Texas on 20 and 21 April and requested that the items be sent to Redfield to arrive by 25 April. The town's status as a railroad junction made it easier to receive the necessary supplies on time there than in Pierre. Moreover, Redfield's superior rail connections enabled special excursion trains to come from all directions on 25 April, which would boost attendance for an air show. Thus, substituting a show in Redfield for the planned exhibition in Pierre appears to have been a sound decision.¹⁴

Executing War Department plans for the bond tour made First Lieutenant Donovan R. Phillips, the "advance agent" for Flying Circus No. 2, a busy man. His job was to travel one week ahead of the main group to make arrangements in each of the cities where the flying circus would perform. Phillips was to work with local Victory Loan committees to pick out suitable flying fields, which had to be near railway sidings. The lieutenant was also responsible for finding trucks to haul the airplanes between the sidings and the airfields before and after each show, obtaining local police for crowd control, and arranging for supplies of high-octane aviation gasoline. A final consideration in every city was any post-exhibition entertainment the local Victory Loan committee might promise to provide.¹⁵

Flying Circus No. 2 arrived in Aberdeen with eighteen airplanes aboard its *Victory Loan Special* train at 7:30 a.m. on 24 April. The

13. *Official U.S. Bulletin*, 17 Mar. 1919; Victory Loan Mid-West Flight Schedule, 29 Mar. 1919, and Major O. M. Baldinger to Mrs. T. M. Prather, Slaughters, Ky., 14 Apr. 1919, both RG 18, NARA-CP.

14. War Diary, sheets 18, 20, 23, 30.

15. Director of Air Service to Commanding Officer, Ellington Field, Tex., 21 Mar. 1919, RG 18, NARA-CP; War Diary, sheet 3.

twenty-six officers and forty-nine enlisted men had rested in the train's three sleeping cars during their 225-mile, twelve-and-one-half hour trip south from Fargo, North Dakota, where they had performed the previous day. Second Lieutenant E. P. Streeter, the group's assistant executive officer, reported that all personnel arrived in good condition.¹⁶

Aberdeen was the fourteenth tour stop for the Mid-West Flight. While the city had been on the revised schedule of 29 March solely as a stop for watering, switching, and repairing the train, its sizeable population made it a perfect candidate for a Victory Loan air show following the exhibition in Fargo. Since Aberdeen was also the home of John C. Bassett, chairman of the South Dakota Victory Loan committee, it was no surprise that the local Victory Loan campaign was well organized and offered all the necessary amenities for a successful performance. The special train's morning arrival in Aberdeen maintained the group's regular travel routine, allowing the pilots and ground crew time to unload the airplanes, transport them to Melgaard Park, assemble them, and then test them prior to taking their first passengers. Aberdeen officials suspended all city business for the day at 11 a.m., the time designated for passenger flights to begin.¹⁷

The Mid-West Flight's eighteen airplanes included thirteen single-seat fighters. Five were German Fokker D.VIIs taken from a cohort of factory-new machines that the German government had turned over to American forces at Koblenz, Germany, on 1 January 1919, in accordance with the Armistice of November 1918. The flying circus also used four SPAD VIIs built from a French design by Mann, Egerton, & Company in Norwich, England. The group's four SE-5a fighters were built by the Austin Motor Company in Longbridge, Worcestershire, England. The presence of these foreign-built fighters reflected the fact that the majority of combat aircraft flown by American pilots during the "Great War" had been assembled in France and Britain. The other five airplanes in the flying circus were American-built two-seaters, consisting of four Curtiss JN-4H "Jennys" from Kelly Field, San Antonio, Texas, and one JN-6H Jenny from the Fiftieth Photo Section, a special

16. War Diary, sheet 27.

17. Ibid.; Hanson, *South Dakota in the World War*, p. 78.



Unloading aircraft from the train and assembling them before the show was a daily routine for the flying circus ground crew. Here, soldiers assemble two German Fokker D.VII fighters in Aberdeen on the morning of 24 April 1919.

technical unit active at Ellington Field, Houston, Texas, between August 1918 and April 1919.¹⁸

Major George E. Stratemeyer commanded the flying circus. Major Edgar G. Tobin, a six-victory ace with the 103^d Aero Squadron, supervised the group's flight operations. Captain William P. Erwin of the First Aero Squadron, credited with eight aerial victories, was the other American ace present. The remaining Army Air Service aviators were primarily flight instructors and other experienced pilots drawn from Kelly Field and Ellington Field in Texas. Two British Royal Air Force (RAF) aces, Captains Thomas C. Traill and Anthony Beauchamp-Proctor, accompanied the American fliers. In addition to their flying duties, the pilots were expected to give talks about their war experiences, make appearances at booths where Victory Loan bonds were sold, and speak at various dinners after air shows.¹⁹

The War Department's original plans for the Victory Loan flights had envisioned using one hundred fifty enlisted men from the 103^d

18. Director of Air Service to Commanding Officer, Ellington Field, Tex., 21 Mar. 1919; Alan D. Toelle, "Wings over America, Victory Loan Flying Circus, Far West Flight," *Over the Front* 29 (2014): 354; U.S., Department of the Army, Center for Military History, *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War (1917-19), Zone of the Interior: Directory of Troops*, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1949), 3:1121.

19. War Diary, sheet 1; *Aberdeen Daily News*, 24 Apr. 1919.

Aero Squadron to service the airplanes for all three flying circuses, with fifty men allocated to each group. Army leaders thought the choice was appropriate because the French government had honored the men of the 103^d with the privilege of wearing the prestigious *fourragère* (honor cord) of the *Croix de Guerre* on their uniforms. The squadron was the only Army Air Service combat unit to earn this distinction. Furthermore, the unit traced its lineage to the *Lafayette Escadrille*, a group of American volunteers who had served in the French Air Service before the United States declared war on Germany in 1917.²⁰

According to the diary of Wallace L. ("Dutch") McCroskey, an enlisted member of the Far West Flight that toured the Pacific coast in 1919, army leaders tried hard to persuade the men of the 103^d Aero Squadron to volunteer for the Victory Loan program. On 10 March 1919, McCroskey wrote, "A Captain, [who] had one bum leg, [and had been] crippled in a crash somewhere, flew from Washington, D.C. to talk to the 103rd about the Circus we are chosen to put on. . . . The Government has chosen the 103rd because of their good record during the war and because it was the only complete outfit in the A.E.F. [American Expeditionary Force] to receive a Foreign Decoration to be worn by everyone; they told us we do not HAVE to sign up to go if we didn't want to, but they would rather have the 103rd."²¹ However, when given the choice, some of the men refused. The Far West Flight got its full complement of fifty men, but the Mid-West Flight received only thirty-five enlisted soldiers from the 103^d Aero Squadron. Of the other fifteen enlisted men in Flying Circus No. 2, two sergeants were drawn from the 189th Aero Squadron at Ellington Field, which was to be demobilized in May 1919, while six other enlisted men came from Squadron "G," an Ellington Field flying school detachment that had been demobilized in December 1918. In addition, a sergeant and two master electricians had been with the Flying School Detachment at Kelly Field, and four other master electricians were drawn from the Air Service Mechanics School at Kelly Field.²²

20. Toelle, "Wings Over America," pp. 293–94.

21. Wallace L. McCroskey Diary, entry for 10 Mar. 1919, collection of Dennis Gordon, Missoula, Mont.

22. War Diary, sheets 1, 2.

Upon entering Aberdeen on 24 April, the *Victory Loan Special* used a passing track adjacent to the west boundary of Melgaard Park, then about half a mile south of the city. Shortly after arrival, ground crews unloaded eleven airplanes from the baggage cars and transferred the aircraft to flatbed trucks for the short haul to the park for assembly. The two Fokkers, two SPADs, two SE-5s, four Curtiss JN-4Hs and the Curtiss JN-6H Jenny formed the show's ground exhibit after assembly. All the airplanes except for one of the SPADs flew later that day.²³

Melgaard Park provided plenty of space for the flying circus. Lieutenant Streeter's entry for the Aberdeen show in the group's official diary described two adjacent fields in the park, both well suited for aviation use. The smaller of the two parcels measured about three hundred by fifteen hundred feet. The two-field arrangement allowed the flying circus to exhibit five Curtiss Jennys on one field, while the five fighter planes took off, did their formation flying and stunts, and landed on the adjacent field. Afterward, the Jennys took off from their field and flew in formation while the fighter planes were exhibited on the ground, providing visitors with close-up views of all aircraft. About six thousand people attended the air show.²⁴

At least five civilians took rides over Aberdeen with the flying circus. The first passengers late that morning were Beryl Grantham and M. W. Williams, secretary of the Aberdeen Commercial Club. Three other passengers went up in the early afternoon, including Frank K. Stuart, publicity man for the Victory Loan drive in South Dakota; Charles L. Van Nest of the Victory/Liberty Loan board in Minneapolis; and J. F. Zietlow.²⁵ During their flights, the passengers dropped pasteboard "bombs" containing Victory Loan leaflets. On one side, the leaflets read, "HOW MANY VICTORY NOTES WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO BUY IF THESE WERE GERMAN BOMBS FALLING ON YOUR HOME?" The other side read, "LIBERTY BONDS KEPT THESE FROM BEING GERMAN BOMBS. VICTORY LIBERTY NOTES PAY FOR PEACE." Each package of two hundred "bombs" contained one

23. Ibid., sheet 27.

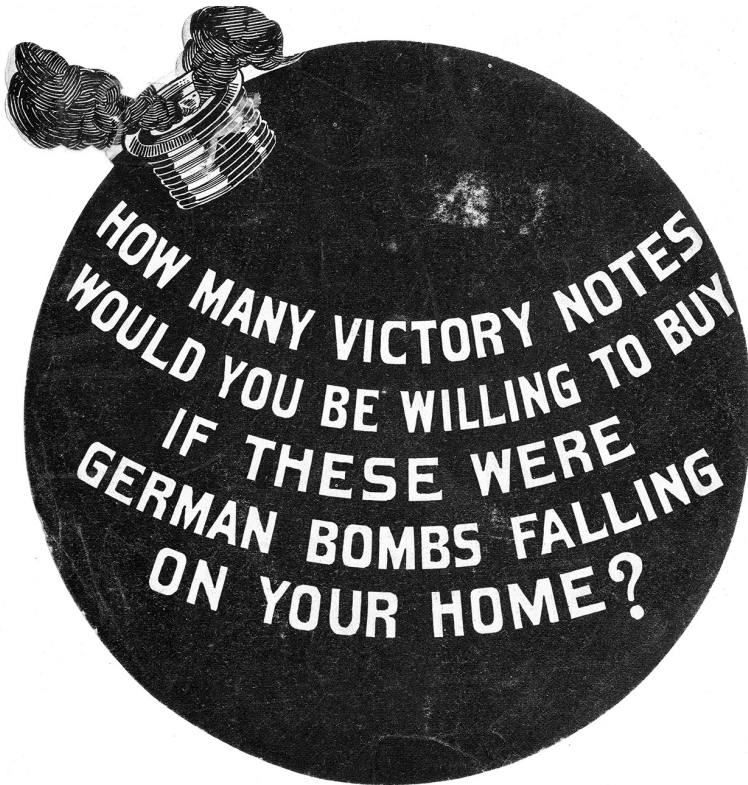
24. Ibid., sheets 27–28.

25. Ibid., sheet 27.

autograph of Treasury Secretary Carter Glass. A fifteen-mile-per-hour westerly wind also aided leaflet distribution to the crowds below.²⁶ Meanwhile, the photographic team of Lieutenants Charles M. Potter (pilot) and Grafton Wiggins (observer) of the Fiftieth Photo Section mapped Aberdeen from the air aboard their Curtiss JN-6H. Wiggins exposed 104 negatives from a reported altitude of thirty-two hundred feet with a Graflex aerial camera. He also took twelve oblique photographs of the city from an altitude of three hundred feet.²⁷

26. *Aberdeen Daily News*, 24 Apr. 1919.

27. War Diary, sheet 28.



The flying circus dropped these pasteboard bombs into the audience during its performances.

Persuading men to enlist for peacetime service in the Army Air Service was an additional task for the flying circus. Accordingly, First Lieutenant P. E. MacGregor of the Mid-West Flight worked with the local army recruiting office to drum up interest among potential enlistees. While the aircraft dropped literature from the sky, officers on the ground used more conventional means to contact prospects during the morning and afternoon of 24 April. The Aberdeen recruiting office stayed open late that evening to serve anyone who might be interested in joining the military.²⁸

With the air show successfully completed, all ten aircraft that had flown in the exhibition left Melgaard Park at 4 p.m. and made the first cross-country flight in South Dakota history. The aircraft traveled approximately forty miles before landing on "Aviation Field," south of what was then the Redfield College campus. Captain W. W. Spain of Redfield, a South Dakota National Guard officer and an experienced aviator himself, flew as a passenger in one of the Jennys in order to guide Flying Circus No. 2 to its destination. The journey, which took about twenty-five minutes, marked the first time that any of the three Victory Loan Flying Circus groups had flown directly from one city to another. The hop to Redfield allowed the Mid-West Flight to avoid dismantling the ten airplanes in Aberdeen, loading them back onto their baggage cars, transporting them to Redfield, and then reassembling them the following morning. Meanwhile, the *Victory Loan Special* departed Aberdeen at 7 p.m. and arrived at the Chicago & North Western Railway (C&NW) depot in Redfield three hours later after a forty-five-mile trip. The train then proceeded to a siding close to the airfield. Unfortunately, with the locomotive now idled, the men complained that there was insufficient steam during the night to heat the Pullman sleeping cars comfortably.²⁹

The Spink County Victory Loan committee had planned and advertised effectively for the 25 April 1919 air exhibition in Redfield, the

28. Ibid.

29. *Aberdeen Daily American*, 25 Apr. 1919; War Diary, sheets 28, 29; *Evening Huronite* (Huron, S.Dak.), 30 Aug. 1929; James J. Hudson, *Hostile Skies: A Combat History of the American Air Service in World War I* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1996), p. 39.



This photograph was probably taken on 25 April 1919, the morning after eight airplanes flew from Aberdeen to Redfield. The two aircraft on the left with protective covers on their propellers are SE-5a fighters. The craft in the middle is a SPAD VII fighter, while three Curtiss Jennys are on the right.

county seat. Organizers had decorated the town gaily with flags and made arrangements for “big bands” from Watertown and Mitchell to entertain the crowds that afternoon. The musicians played throughout the day, both in the city and at the airfield. In addition to regular train service from Watertown and Aberdeen, the organizers had also arranged for special excursion trains from Blunt and Mitchell, located about one hundred miles from Redfield to the west and south, respectively. Finally, due to the publicity generated by the Aberdeen air show, automobiles descended upon Redfield from all directions. The resulting throng of about fifteen thousand people was over twice as large as the crowd that had seen Flying Circus No. 2 in Aberdeen the previous day. Even with a chilly, thirty-mile-per-hour northwest wind, spectators accorded the aviators an excellent reception in Redfield.³⁰

30. War Diary, sheets 29, 30.

The airfield was only about four hundred feet by five hundred feet in size and was rolling and rough in places. Even so, Lieutenant Street-er considered it to be in fair condition. The railroad siding was good, but only one airplane (a SPAD) needed to be taken from the train and assembled. This SPAD, in addition to the ten aircraft that had flown cross-country from Aberdeen to Redfield the previous day, flew in the exhibition on 25 April.³¹

The biggest highlight of the Redfield air show had to be Sergeant First Class C. W. Peckham of the 103^d Aero Squadron, who rode aloft on the landing gear of a Curtiss Jenny piloted by Second Lieutenant J. W. Maxey. Peckham then shifted his position and sat on the leading edge of one of the lower wings, thrilling the spectators. In addition, seven civilians took rides in the Jennys that afternoon. The lucky passengers were E. O. Connolly of Sioux Falls, Katharine M. Fargo of Redfield, W. O. Kisir, Jr., of Redfield, L. Irene Labrie of Redfield, George Nor-

31. *Ibid.*, sheet 30.



Royal Air Force Captains Anthony Beauchamp-Proctor (second from left) and Thomas C. Traill (third from right), along with Lieutenant J. H. Sullivan of the United States Army Air Service (far right), mingle with spectators during the Redfield air show.

beck of Redfield, E. T. Pickering of Minneapolis, and O. E. Stutenroth of Redfield.³²

One of the routine air-show attractions was for the Fokker D.VII fighters to stage a mock attack on a formation of Curtiss Jennys, with the SE-5s and SPADs “counterattacking” the Fokkers to drive them off. This demonstration recalled actual air battles over France during the war, in which American SPADs engaged German Fokkers that attempted to intercept Allied observation planes. Apparently, the flying circus had not planned such a sham battle for the Redfield exhibition. Rather, the group’s five Curtiss aircraft went aloft to demonstrate a V-formation while carrying civilian passengers who were to drop Victory Loan leaflets. One of the Jennys, however, developed engine trouble and had to land. Seeing the gap in the formation, Captain Traill of the Royal Air Force attempted to maneuver his Fokker into the place of the missing Jenny. Traill was an ace with eight aerial victories during the war, mostly in “Bristol” two-seat fighters, and an experienced formation flyer.³³ The remaining Jenny pilots, according to Lieutenant Streeter’s account, thought that Traill was “looking for trouble” and broke formation. The SE-5s and SPADs quickly sped to the “rescue” and “shot down” Traill’s Fokker several times. The British pilot quickly learned not to insert himself into any more Jenny formations.³⁴

Much like he had the previous day in Aberdeen, Lieutenant MacGregor, the recruiting officer, stayed busy throughout the day distributing Victory Loan and recruiting literature on the ground and from the sky. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Wiggins took three dozen aerial photographs of Redfield with his Graflex camera and turned them over to the Spink County Victory Loan committee. Lieutenant Streeter’s official diary entry for the day commended the police protection afforded the Mid-West Flight during its stay in Redfield, the great interest the audience displayed during the first air exhibition ever held in the town, and the hospitality townspeople offered to the officers and

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., sheet 29; Director of Air Service to Commanding Officer, Ellington Field, 21 Mar. 1919; Christopher Shores, Norman Franks, and Russell Guest, *Above the Trenches* (London: Fortress Publications, 1990), p. 366.

34. War Diary, sheet 29.

men. With its passengers having made lasting memories, the *Victory Loan Special* departed Redfield at 1 a.m. on 26 April, bound for Sioux Falls.³⁵ Streeter summarized the aviators' experience in Redfield with the comment, "This exhibition [was] undoubtedly the best thus far, in many respects."³⁶

The temperature was about forty degrees when the train arrived at the north end of Sioux Falls at 8:30 a.m. after a seven-and-one-half hour, 190-mile trip from Redfield. The probable route of travel followed the C&NW from Redfield to Watertown, and then the Great Northern Railway from Watertown to Sioux Falls. After reaching the C&NW depot downtown at Fifth Street and North Phillips Avenue, the *Victory Loan Special* traveled westward towards what was then known as "West Sioux Falls" and then stopped at the "Stone Crusher Switch Siding," only twenty-five yards from the selected flying field, then known as "Lyons Field."³⁷ Although the field was reportedly a 500-foot (east to west) by 1,000-foot (north to south) parcel, its effective landing space measured only 450 feet by 600 feet. Lieutenant Streeter's official diary entry described "a large green hill" located "about a mile from the field," where "hundreds of cars" from Sioux Falls parked.³⁸ The hill Streeter described is most likely Sherman Bluff, located in Sherman Park, which is about fifty feet higher in elevation than the probable airfield location on the present-day W. H. Lyon Fairgrounds.³⁹ Situated about two-and-one-quarter miles west of downtown Sioux Falls along West Twelfth Street, this spot was convenient for the estimated fifteen thousand spectators. People could also drive along West Eighteenth Street or Twenty-second Street, or take an electric streetcar to Sherman Park via Twenty-second Street from Summit Avenue.⁴⁰

Everything had seemed to go right with the previous day's exhibition in Redfield. Unfortunately, however, things started unraveling

35. Ibid., sheets 29, 30.

36. Ibid., sheet 29.

37. Ibid., sheet 31.

38. Ibid., sheet 31.

39. The elevation of Lyons Field is approximately 1,420 feet above sea level, while a benchmark atop Sherman Bluff reads 1,469 feet. See U.S., Geological Survey, *Sioux Falls West, SD*, topographic map, 1:24,000 scale, 2015.

40. War Diary, sheet 31; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 26 Apr. 1919.



This group of officers assembled for a photograph prior to the air show at Sioux Falls on 26 April 1919. In front, from left, are Captains William P. Erwin and Anthony Beauchamp-Proctor and Lieutenants Joseph L. Whitney, Alvin M. St. John, Harris C. Roberts, and Frank B. Estill (wearing flight goggles). The officer sitting behind Erwin is unknown, as are the two men standing at left. In the back row, beginning third from left, are Major George E. Stratemeyer and Lieutenants L. R. Hewitt, A. E. Selberg, and Edward H. Hill. Between the rows, Captain Howard H. Powell peers over Proctor's left shoulder while Lieutenant Franklin O. Carroll is obscured behind Roberts and St. John.

from the moment the flying circus arrived in Sioux Falls. Lieutenant Streeter noted that C&NW Railway personnel in the larger city were not nearly as efficient as they had been in Redfield. Watering, switching, and repairing the train went much more slowly in Sioux Falls. A bigger concern was the minor collision between one of the baggage cars and an adjoining passenger car that occurred when a drawbar was pulled just as the train was entering the siding near Lyons Field.⁴¹ The mishap seemed to set the tone for the rest of the day.

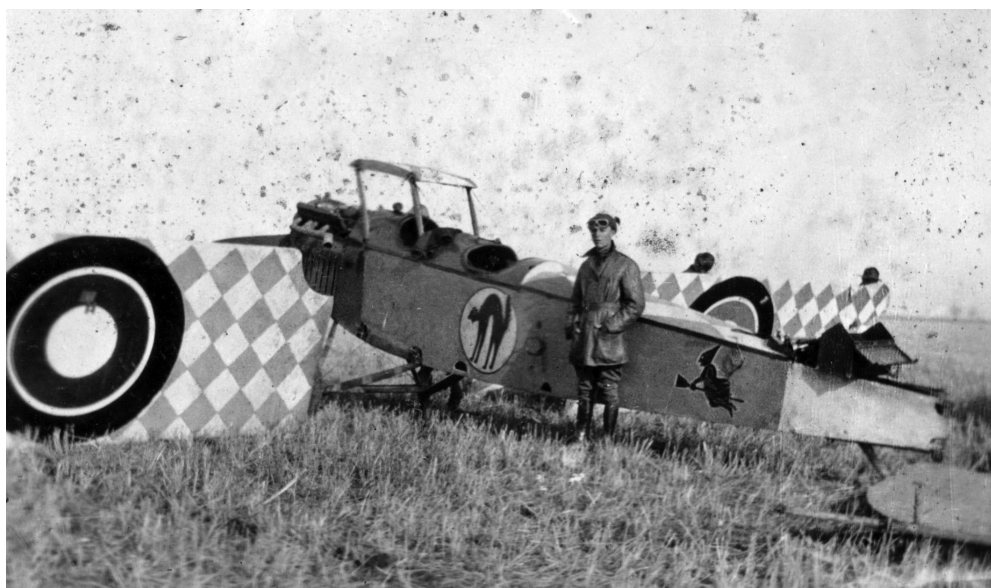
The ground crew unloaded nine airplanes from the baggage cars

41. War Diary, sheet 31.

immediately after arrival, including two Fokkers, one SPAD, two SE-5s, three Curtiss JN-4H Jennys and the JN-6H Jenny. Crowds soon gathered at Lyons Field to watch the unloading and assembly of the airplanes. About 11 a.m., the Curtiss Jennys started flight testing with passengers. Second Lieutenant Edward H. Hill made a test flight in the JN-6H "Red Devil" Jenny with the Mid-West Flight's civilian disbursing officer, A. G. Furber of Minneapolis, as a passenger. A second "Jenny" carried Niels O. Monserud of Sioux Falls, the Minnehaha County Victory Loan committee chairman. Hill and Furber took off first, circled above the field and then skimmed eastward over the city, where thousands of people in the streets watched their flight. After the second Jenny with Monserud aboard took off, the two craft divided the attention of the watchers below for a time.⁴²

The JN-6H Jenny soon experienced engine trouble and made a forced landing about seven miles from Lyons Field. Fortunately, Lieu-

42. Ibid.



First Lieutenant Frank B. Estill poses with his partially assembled Curtiss Jenny before the Sioux Falls air show.

tenant Hill revved its 150-horsepower Wright-Hispano motor to create the high-velocity gasoline stream needed to “clear the jets” while on the ground, enabling the craft to return to the field. Hill’s plane broke its tail skid in the process of landing. Although the part had to be replaced before the photography plane could take off later that afternoon, cloudy weather created poor light conditions that ruled out taking aerial photographs anyway. Nevertheless, Lieutenant Wiggins later exposed two dozen plates of oblique ground views and turned them over to the Minnehaha County Victory Loan committee.⁴³

Monserud, meanwhile, had shown little outward concern when he donned an aviator’s cap and goggles and boarded his “Jenny.” Although the ground crew had “carefully tucked and strapped” him in place aboard the aircraft and he had done his best to prepare for the experience, he was, as the *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader* later reported, “hardly ready for the aerobatic performance to which he was treated.” The numerous loops, nose dives, and tail spins in his flight over Sioux Falls kept “the crowd speculating on what Mr. Monserud might be thinking.” After about half an hour aloft, the Jenny executed a smooth landing. Its passenger disembarked “looking a little wild-eyed and somewhat speechless but none the worse for his experience.” Now admitting to being nervous during his aerial adventure, Monserud reportedly “confessed that he did not do much but hang on and wish the pilot would quit.”⁴⁴

Three other lucky Sioux Falls residents took airplane rides that morning, including L. R. Bates of 630 North Minnesota Avenue, Mary B. Cook of 410 North Grange Avenue, and Ray G. Stevens of 200 East Twenty-third Street. While the Jennys completed flight tests and took up passengers that morning, the single-seat planes went on display on the ground. All of the exhibited aircraft except one of the Fokkers flew in the afternoon. The temperature was 48 degrees at noon, with a high temperature of 50 degrees recorded at 1 p.m. Charlie S. McDonald, of 314 South Prairie Avenue in Sioux Falls, was the only civilian to ride in a Jenny in the afternoon. An unsteady southeast wind, variously re-

43. Ibid., sheets 31, 32.

44. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 26 Apr. 1919.

ported at twenty-five to thirty-five miles per hour, caused the airplanes to take off heading from south to north, while landing from north to south.⁴⁵

The city was practically at a standstill at 1:30 p.m., as crowds gathered to watch the air show. During the afternoon performance, the roofs of tall buildings in downtown Sioux Falls provided vantage points for sightseers. Some Sioux Falls buildings that likely served as

45. Ibid.; War Diary, sheet 31.



Mary B. Cook took an airplane ride with the Victory Loan Flying Circus during the Sioux Falls show. She is pictured here with Second Lieutenant Joseph L. Whitney.

ad hoc observation points for the air show include the Carpenter Hotel at 221 South Phillips Avenue, the Security Bank Building at 101 South Main Avenue, the 142-foot-tall, nine-story Sioux Falls National Bank Building at 100 North Phillips Avenue, the Andrew Kuehn Warehouse at 401 North Phillips Avenue, and the Shriver-Johnson Department Store at 230 South Phillips Avenue.⁴⁶

The one flyable German Fokker was the first aircraft to come into view over the city on the afternoon of 26 April. Flying back and forth, it swooped low at times to release pasteboard “bombs” like those dropped over Aberdeen two days earlier. The projectiles, along with their cargo of Victory Loan leaflets, settled and scattered out over a wide area. Several times, the pilot guided his craft to within one hundred feet of the Sioux Falls National Bank building and greeted the spectators on the rooftop with a wave of his hand. Soon, the SPAD, an SE-5, three JN-4H Jennys and the repaired JN-6H Jenny joined the Fokker. The planes came together and circled the city in battle formation before returning westward to the vicinity of Lyons Field.⁴⁷

While the crowd clearly enjoyed the entire air show, Royal Air Force Captain Anthony Beauchamp-Proctor, a twenty-two-year-old South African ace credited with fifty-four aerial victories, provided the most excitement. Wounded on 8 October 1918 shortly after his last victory in northern France, Proctor had earned the Victoria Cross, Britain’s highest military decoration, for his combat exploits. He had been hospitalized until March 1919, when he agreed to participate in the Victory Loan drive with the Mid-West Flight. On 26 April 1919, he flew over Sioux Falls for nearly an hour. While the rest of Flying Circus No. 2 was flying in formation over the city, Proctor started out from Lyons Field in an SE-5, the same type of machine he had used to score all of his aerial victories in France. Soon after takeoff, he buzzed the *Victory Loan Special* on the siding near the airfield. While the German Fokker and other aircraft had indulged in “crowd strafing” and a sham air

46. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 26 Apr. 1919. Addresses for some of these buildings were obtained from the National Register of Historic Places. See U.S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register Information System, <http://focus.nps.gov/nrhp>.

47. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 26 Apr. 1919.

battle that afternoon, Proctor would have none of it. Instead, while the other seven airplanes were flying away from the city in formation, Proctor approached the downtown area and performed aerobatics. Even though he appeared diminutive, standing five feet two inches tall and weighing only 102 pounds, he displayed the most daring dives and spins of all the pilots in Sioux Falls. Proctor's prowess was such that he formed an aerobatic team flying Sopwith "Snipes" after returning to England in December 1920. Unfortunately, he died in a crash in June 1921 while practicing with his team.⁴⁸

While both the airmen themselves and the local newspaper thought that the Sioux Falls air exhibition went well, Lieutenant Streeter's assessment that the Minnehaha County Victory Loan Committee "seemed to be rather inactive" appears to have been a polite understatement.⁴⁹ Although the *Argus Leader* reported that the pilots and crew would parade to the Sioux Falls coliseum in the evening for a "reception and an opportunity for the people to meet the various aces," other publicity for the event was apparently not adequate.⁵⁰ Lieutenant Streeter wrote a colorful account of the shortcomings in the committee's arrangements: "The Circus was asked to parade at 7:30 p.m. and speak at the Coliseum, a band was to be furnished. On arrival at the station, the Circus was met by the cast offs of the city, two or three committeemen, a couple of drummers, and a fife player. It was believed there would be a large crowd at the Coliseum so we paraded to that place, a distance of four blocks. The Coliseum was half filled and most of the spectators were women and children. It was found later that this event had not been advertised, and that few representative people of the city knew about it, hence it was a farce and a complete failure."⁵¹

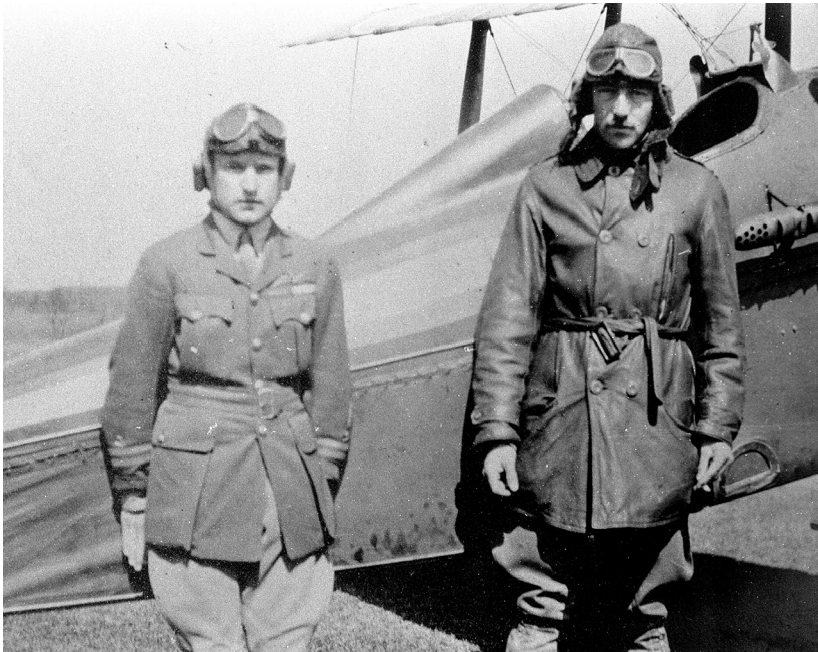
After the parade and coliseum debacle on the evening of 26 April, the aviators and ground crew of Flying Circus No. 2 appreciated a good dinner. Fortunately, the *Victory Loan Special* included a Pullman dining

48. Shores, Franks, and Guest, *Above the Trenches*, p. 68; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 26 Apr. 1919.

49. War Diary, sheet 32.

50. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 26 Apr. 1919.

51. War Diary, sheet 32.



Royal Air Force Captain Anthony Beauchamp-Proctor (left) stands alongside an SE-5a fighter before his aerobatics performance over Sioux Falls. At right is Captain Howard H. Powell.

car, which served three satisfying meals while the airmen were in Sioux Falls. Following its planned itinerary, the train departed Sioux Falls at 10 p.m., bound for the next air exhibition at Sioux City, Iowa, on 27 April. The ninety-one-mile trip took six hours.⁵²

Flying Circus No. 2 had begun its tour to enlist public support for the Victory Loan by departing from Houston, Texas, on 9 April. The group's first scheduled air show, at New Orleans on 10 April, had to be cancelled due to rain. From New Orleans, the airmen had traveled as far east as Chicago and as far north as Grand Forks, North Dakota, where they began the southbound leg of their tour. Aberdeen and Redfield were to be the westernmost points of their journey. Although the original plans for the tour listed twenty-one cities to be visited, the

52. *Ibid.*, sheets 31–33.

Mid-West Flight staged air shows in twenty-three different communities, even with the New Orleans cancellation and a rained-out show in Shreveport, Louisiana, on 6 May.⁵³ The three exhibitions in South Dakota made history by staging the state's first cross-country formation flight, entertaining over thirty-six thousand people, and showcasing America's air power while selling bonds to finance the country's efforts in the world's first global war. As such, the Victory Loan events of 24–26 April 1919 in South Dakota should be remembered as an outstanding success.

53. Victory Loan Mid-West Flight Schedule, 29 Mar. 1919; War Diary, sheets 2–54.