

Lieutenant Jasper J. Ffrench

Jasper J. Ffrench was born at Brookfield, Illinois on the 6th May, 1895 the son of Charles and Florence Ffrench. He was educated at Notre Dame University, Chicago, the Armour Institute where he studied architecture and at the time of his entry into the American army he was studying law at the Northwestern University.

On his First World War Draft Registration Card 1917-1918, Jasper was described as being tall, slender, with brown eyes and hair, a natural-born citizen, single, white, not dependent on his family, a law student and resided at 5850 Harper Avenue, Illinois. The registration card was signed and dated 6th February, 1917. Having broken off diplomatic relations in February America declared war on Germany on the 6th April, 1917. Jasper underwent his initial Army training at Austin, Texas. He qualified for the First Officers Training Camp at Fort Sheridan, Illinois where he developed an interest in flying and was one of five chosen for the Aviation Section. Fort Sheridan, named after the civil war cavalry general, Philip Sheridan was established as an army post in 1887.

Jasper began his flying training at Kelly Field, San Antonio, Texas where he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant and remained there as an instructor and subsequently promoted. Kelly Field was one of thirty-two Air Service training camps established in March 1917. The Americans became aware that although aircraft and their capabilities were still experimental in the early years of the 20th century, they could potentially become an effective aerial weapon of war.

After considerable discussion by the US Government and Army authorities the San Antonio site was chosen for a new air field in November 1916. Operational from the Spring of 1917 Kelly Field was named after Lieutenant G.E.M. Kelly who died in an aircraft accident on the 10th May, 1910. Primarily it was a training school and an aviation depot. During the First World War 1490 pilots and 398 flying instructors graduated from Kelly aviation schools. Kelly Field continued to be used after the war and became Kelly Air Force Base up until 2001, predominately as a logistics centre. Reorganisation by the US Defence Logistics Agency brought about partial closure and downsizing of the base and in 2001 it was designated Kelly Field Annex.

Lieutenant Ffrench was posted to Carruthers Field instructing cadets and pilot officers at Payne Field in advance flying. Benbrook Field was a former First World War Military airfield near Benbrook, Texas. It was operated as a training facility for the US Army Air Service between 1917 and 1919. General J.J. Pershing invited the Royal Flying Corps to establish training fields in Texas for training of American and Canadian volunteers because of the mild climate. Three

sites were established in 1917 in the Fort Worth vicinity, Hicks Field, Barron Field and Benbrook Field. The Canadians named their training complex Camp Taliaferro after an American aviator Walter Taliaferro who had been killed in a flying accident. Taliaferro Camp No.3 was used by the RFC from October 1917 to April 1918 for training American and Canadian pilots. Handed over to the US Army Air Service who renamed the airfield Carruthers Field, after Cadet W.K. Carruthers, who was killed at Hazelhurst Field, New York in June 1917. It was renamed Benbrook Field in 1918 by the US Army. The facility closed in April 1919. Payne Field another former First World War military airfield, north of West Point, Mississippi and was operated by the US Army Air Service for pilot training from 1918 to 1920. Payne Field was named after Captain Dewitt Payne who died from his injuries sustained in a flying accident on the 1st February, 1918. Payne Field was closed two years later.

Lieutenant Ffrench had seven hundred hours flying experience and due to his aptitude as an outstanding instructor he was not sent overseas. He was credited with training approximately three hundred aviators and was a popular, well liked and respected officer by those who he had trained and knew. Normally the instructor in an aircraft occupies the rear seat and his pupil in the front seat. On the 15th October, 1918 Jasper occupied the front seat and his pupil Lieutenant Soule, undergoing advanced instruction was in the rear seat. Flying at 3,000-feet in formation, with other aircraft smoke and licks of flame suddenly began to engulf their Curtiss JN-4 Jennys aircraft. He 'side-slipped' the aircraft to try and keep control of the aircraft and most probably operated a pyrene fire extinguisher to put out the fire. However, it was apparent to observers that he was unable to control the aircraft and it plunged to the ground, killing Lieutenant Ffrench instantly and seriously injuring Lieutenant Soule, who survived and recovered. Lieutenant Jasper Ffrench was 23 years old when he was killed and had married the previous month on the 18th September, Ruth Schollard.

The Chicago Tribune ~ 16th October, 1918.

Jasper Ffrench Killed in Plane Crash At Camp

Son Of Late Chicago Educator Dies In Aero Accident

A telegram to his mother, Mrs Florence Ffrench told last night of the death in a airplane accident of Lieut. Jasper Ffrench, United States aviation corps, at Payne Field, West Point, Miss., where he had been engaged in instruction work for three weeks. A second telegram from one of his associates gave the details that he was in the air with a pupil and was instantly killed when the machine crashed to earth, that the pupil was not killed, and that the body would be brought at

once to Chicago to his widow. Lieut. Ffrench, who was 23 years old, was married on Sept. 18. His bride was Ruth Schollard of Dallas, Texas.

A 'Stunt' Instructor

The dead airman had been in service about a year. He made such progress that in February last he was made a "stunt" instructor and exhibition flyer at one of the Texas aviation fields. His roll of pupils was said by his mother last night to be in excess of 300 with never an accident till yesterday's fatal drop. One of the flyers who took his instruction under young Ffrench was Lieut. Eugene Durant, whose death from pneumonia occurred Monday last at his home, 5712 Harper Avenue, and the two flyers had been friends since boyhood. Mrs Ffrench is owner and editor of the Musical Leader, founded by her husband the late Charles Ffrench, prominent in Chicago as a member of the board of education and as president of the Irish Fellowship Club. Mrs Florence Ffrench is well known on the concert stage. Last Monday Campanini added her to the list of principal sopranos for the Chicago Opera.

Dallas News ~ 19th October, 1918.

Funeral service for Lieutenant Jasper J. Ffrench, who was killed when his plane fell with him at Payne Field, West Point, Miss., will be held from the home of his mother-in-law, Mrs Tom W. Schollard, 1617 Forest Avenue, this afternoon. It will be a military funeral at Oakland Cemetery at 5:30 o'clock.

A Letter From The War Office:

War Department

Division of Military Aeronautics

Washington

Dear Mrs Ffrench

Your son, Lieutenant Jasper J. Ffrench, made the supreme sacrifice for his country at Payne Field, West Point, Mississippi, on October 15, 1918.

He gave his life over here to help build up a Service which already is saving thousands of lives overseas. His sacrifice is not less helpful to our cause than if it had been made in France. The toll paid in preparing an Air Army is a part of the price of Victory, not more avoidable nor less effective than that paid over the battle-line.

Your son has become one of the nation's heroes. He sought out the front line of danger and was one of those privileged to be selected for it. His name is inscribed on the Honor Roll of the American Air Service.

I join with his brother officers in sending you my deepest sympathy.

Most Sincerely Yours,

W.L. Kenly

Major General, U.S.A.

To Mrs C. Ffrench

5850 Harper Ave.

Chicago, Ill.

Lieutenant Ffrench's body was taken from Payne Field, West Point, Mississippi to Dallas for his funeral. On the 19th October, the funeral cortege left the residence of his mother-in-law, Mrs Tom W. Schollard accompanied by his mother, brothers and sisters, Charles, Clatie, Evelyn, Mrs Josephine Demerath and Florence, Jr. The cortege was escorted by a drum corps, bugle corps and a company of cadets from Camp Dick.

As a tribute to their former instructor two pilots flew their aircraft low over the cortege procession as it wound its way towards Oakland Cemetery dropping flowers. The streets were lined with hundreds of people and children picked up the flowers after the cortege passed by. After the funeral service and appropriate military honours floral tributes from his family, comrades and friends covered his grave.

Memorial Plaque

How and why the silver plaque below came to the United Kingdom having been presumably presented to Lieutenant Ffrench's widow Ruth, remains unanswered. The first line on the plaque 'To His Wife' is clearly a heartfelt and sympathetic personal message from the officers and instructors listed to the memory of Lieutenant Ffrench. It is quite unusual to find a plaque to an American First World War army pilot and a fitting tribute in remembrance of him.



Silver Memorial Plaque In Remembrance Of Lieutenant Jasper J. Ffrench US Army Air Service

The inscription in the plaque reads:-

To His Wife
 In Memory And Admiration Of
Lieut. Jasper J. Ffrench, A.S.M.A.
 Who Died In The Service Of His Country
 In The Cause Of Liberty
 October 15, 1918

He Endeared Himself To All Who Knew
 Him By The Consistency Of His Life And
 The Sterling Worth Of His Character.

This Tablet Is Inscribed As A Tribute
 Of High Esteem By His Many Friends;
 Flying Officers Of Payne Field, Miss.,
 Officers Of The Post And Associate Officers.

Lieut. Harold Def. Gale	Lieut. Silas A. Dobbs
Lieut. Reuben J. Chadbourne	Lieut. Curtis R. Friday
Instructors	
Lieut. Richard E. Williams	Lieut. J.A. Loder
Lieut. Edward M. Powers	Lieut. H.N. Wolcott
Lieut. Courtney Whitney	Lieut. Max B. Miller
Lieut. Frank E. McMillan, Jr.	Lieut. Ralph C. Grey
Lieut. Duane E. Walrath	Lieut. John A. Coffee
Lieut. John G. Williams	Lieut. William B. Sousa
Lieut. Richard H. Fairclough	Lieut. Foster G. Strong
Lieut. William F. Shaw	Lieut. Edwin L. Berg
Lieut. Bonifield M. Spencer	Lieut. Wilton M. Briney
Lieut. Harry C. Knickerbocker	

Sources

www.wikipedia.com

www.findagrave.com ~ Article/Notes by Carol Moore

Letter ~ US War Office

The Chicago Tribune 16th October 1918

Dallas News 9th October 1918

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R.G. Coleman