

The Novato Historian

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Preserving Novato's History

Feature Section

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Henry Harley ("Hap") Arnold A True Pioneer

by John A. Trumbull

What is a "Pioneer?" If it is an individual who challenges unexplored regions relying on his own intelligence, problem solving ability, and ambitions; and who advocates based upon his own experience and convictions despite obstacles and opposition, then H. H. Arnold is a true pioneer. He was one of the first four military aviators in the service of the United States, and he guided United States military aviation to its pre-eminent position as a world power while becoming the only person in U.S. history to hold the rank of five star general in both the Army and Air Force. He loved Hamilton Field and in 1946 retired to live in the North Bay area.

Henry Harley Arnold was born June 25, 1886, in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania. His mother, Louise Harley (1857 – 1931) was from a "Dunker" farm background, and was the first female in her family to attend high school. His father, Herbert Alonzo Arnold (1857 – 1933), was a physician who came from a prominent political and military family. Joining the Pennsylvania National Guard during the Spanish American war, Dr. Arnold served as a unit surgeon for the next 24 years.

Hap was raised as a Baptist with strong ties to the Mennonite faith. When he graduated from high school in 1903, he planned to attend Bucknell University to study for the Baptist ministry. It was the family's

expectation that Hap's older brother, Thomas, would attend West Point, but Thomas had other ideas and, defying his father, he refused to apply. Hap applied and received a slot that became vacant when another applicant was discovered to be married, a breach of academy regulations. Hap's record at West Point was more distinguished by his athletic achievements and social activities than by scholastic diligence. He graduated 66th in a class of 111. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the 29th Infantry on June 14, 1907, nine days before his 21st birthday. This was somewhat of a disappointment to him since service with the Cavalry was what he sought, but his comportment and scholastic records did not support that assignment.

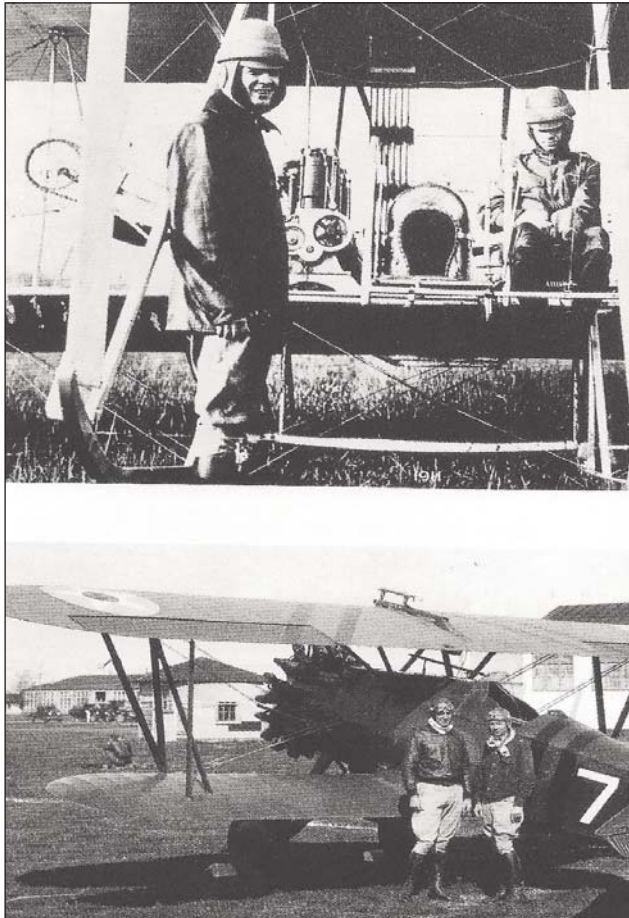
Hap's first station was in Manila, the Philippines, where he arrived December 7, 1907. He served there for 18 months, a portion of which was spent assisting Captain Charles Chandler (the first head of the Army's Aeronautical Division which was created in 1907) in mapping the island of Luzon. In June 1909, Hap and his unit returned to the

U.S. In route at Paris, France, Hap saw his first airplane in flight, piloted by Louis Bleriot. This awakened his interest in aviation. At his request he received Special Order 95 in April 1911, detailing him (and 2nd Lt. Thomas DeWitt Milling) to Dayton, Ohio, for flight instruction at the Wright brother's aviation school at



Henry Harley Arnold

Simms Station, Ohio. Hap soloed after 3 hours and 48 minutes instruction (an hour and 48 minutes more instruction than Milling required). On July 6, 1911, Hap received FAI (Federation Aeronautic Internationale) Pilot Certificate #29, and one year later, Military Aviator Certificate #2. Arnold and Milling were assigned to the Aeronautical Division of the Army Signal Corps at College Park, Maryland, and became the Army's first flight instructors. It was here that



Top, Arnold and Milling at flying school and, in the bottom photo, the two of them twenty years later.

Arnold upon four occasions set new altitude records: 3,260 feet on July 7, 1911; 4,167 feet on August 18; 4,764 feet on January 25, 1912; and 6,540 feet on June 1. On August 21, he piloted the first “long” cross country flight, for 42 miles in a Burgess-Wright biplane from College Park to the D.C. National Guard encampment at Fredericksburg, Maryland. In September 1911, he became the first pilot to carry mail, flying a bundle of letters 5 miles on Long Island, New York. He is also reputed to be the first pilot to fly over the White House and the first pilot to carry a U.S. Congressman as a passenger. In October 1912, Arnold won the MacKay Trophy for the “most outstanding military flight of the

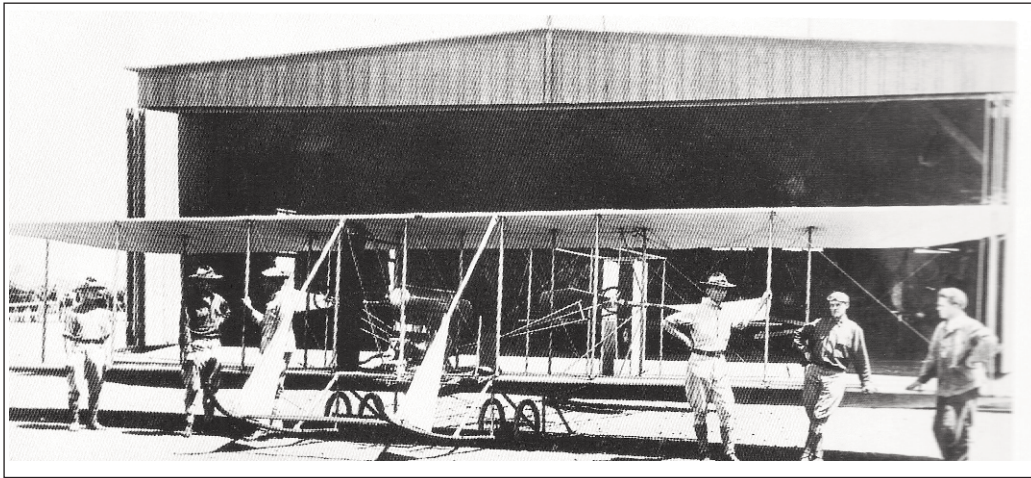
year” by flying 20 miles, locating a company of cavalry in a 100 square mile target area from an altitude of at least 1,500 feet, and then returning safely to report to his air base despite severely turbulent flying conditions. On November 2 with 1st Lt. Follett Bradley flying as his wireless operator, the first successful radio-telegraph message was sent from an aircraft (a Wright Speed Scout) to the ground, a distance of 6 miles.

Three days later Arnold was involved in one of his most serious airplane crashes. He was almost killed when his plane stalled and went into a potentially fatal spin. At this time airports were either nonexistent or at best rudimentary. In-flight controls and instrumentation were primitive especially in less than ideal weather conditions, and a pilot's safety equipment consisted of a leather football helmet. Flying was so dangerous that no stigma was attached to those who chose to refrain from the activity. By December 1912, Arnold had been personally involved in enough mishaps and had seen enough of his fellow pilots killed that he joined the 5 military aviators (out of a total of 14 active military pilots) who transferred out of flying service. He accepted a staff position in the Office of the Chief Signal Officer in Washington DC but it really was his desire to return to the Philippines. [This he did following his marriage to Eleanor Pool (nicknamed Bee by her brothers) on September 10, 1913.] There he met and became friends with 1st Lt. George C. Marshall.

During the ensuing years Hap served as a supply officer at the Signal Corps Aviation Schools at Rockwell Field, California, and was sent to Panama to find a suitable location for an airfield. This last task was not accomplished due to a military dispute, and he was enroute back to Washington DC when WWI broke out.

Throughout WWI he served stateside as Officer In Charge of the Information Division, as assistant Executive of the Aeronautical Division, and then Executive Officer of that service when it became the Air Division on October 1, 1917. In these roles he dealt with aircraft procurement and production, construction of air schools and airfields, recruitment and training of large numbers of personnel, and the challenge caused by the political infighting of Washington. By this time he had reached the wartime rank of full Colonel, making him the youngest full colonel in the service.

He arranged to go to France during WWI, but fate decreed that he arrived on the day the war ended, November 11, 1918. He was back at Rockwell Field in January 1919 as District Supervisor of the Western District of the Air Service charged with overseeing the demobilization of 8,000 airmen and the surplus aircraft.



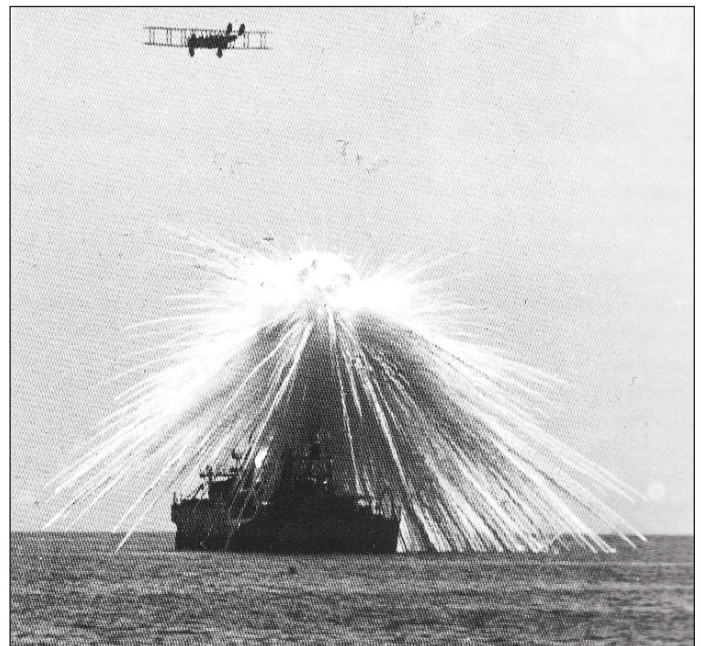
The Wright Flyer

It was here he established ties with Captain Carl A. Spaatz and 1st Lt. Ira C. Eaker (who would become influential generals and area commanders in WWII).

Between the spring of 1919 and November 1925, Billy Mitchell, as Assistant Chief of the Air Service, pursued a vigorous and very public policy controversy with both the Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Wm. S. Benson, and Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin D. Roosevelt (who were advocates for more capital ships to strengthen the navy) and also with Army Maj. Gen. Charles T. Menoher, the Director of Air Service in 1919. Among his controversial theories, Mitchell suggested to General John J. Pershing that the Air Service be divided into two separate branches: one under the command of the ground commander to support ground troops, and the other under Air Service command to pursue strategic operations against enemy aircraft and materiel at a distance from the front line. The need for a large air force even at the cost of expansion of the white water navy was very controversial and Mitchell was both persistent and unorthodox in publicizing his views. Despite the apparent success of air power in sinking the ex-German destroyer, "G102," and the ex-German light cruiser, "Frankfurt," and the ex-German battleship, "Ostfriesland," in July 1921, Mitchell was vigorously opposed by the military hierarchy. When he castigated the Army and Navy leadership before the Lambert Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives in 1924, and publicly accused those same officials of incompetence and "almost treasonable administration of the national defense" in 1925, President Calvin Coolidge ordered his court martial for violation of the 96th Article of War.

In August 1924, after a five month study course at the Army Industrial College, Hap had been picked to head the Air Service's Information Division. Despite the threats to their careers, Hap, Spaatz and Eaker testi-

fied on behalf of Billy Mitchell at his court martial in November 1925, and continued their active public support for his views after Mitchell's conviction. Secretary of War Dwight F. Davis ordered Major General Mason M. Patrick, Chief of Air Service, to find and discipline those who persisted in mailing pro-Mitchell information to airpower-friendly congressmen and reservists. Selecting Arnold to serve as an example, Patrick gave Hap the choice of resigning or facing courts martial. Hap chose the latter, and Patrick backed down for fear of another public fiasco. Instead he issued Arnold a reprimand for violation of Army General Order 20 by attempting "to influence legislation in an improper manner." This started a period of "exile" at Fort Riley, Kansas, as commander of the 16th Observation Squadron.



Demonstration of aerial anti-aircraft fire suppression by phosphorus bombing]

Billy Mitchell, who resigned from the service in February 1926 and died at the age of 56 in February 1936, was elevated posthumously to the rank of Major General (two stars) in 1942 by F.D.R. Billy Mitchell was awarded the Congressional Gold medal in 1946 (actions which were repeated by Congress in 2004).

The B-25 "Mitchell" bomber was named in his honor. It is the only U.S. military plane named after a person.

Arnold's exile ended with his assignment to the Army's Command and General Staff School at Leavenworth, Kansas, in August 1928. This year-long assignment was strained due to Arnold's doctrinal dif-

ferences with the school's commandant, Major General Edward L. King. Arnold became Chief of the Field Service Section, Air Corps Materiel Division in 1930 and attained the permanent rank of Lt. Colonel on February 1, 1931.



B-10 bomber

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In November of 1931 he took command of March Field in Southern California with the task of refurbishing it into a showcase installation. He had his officers join local service organizations and conducted a set of well publicized relief efforts, such as the food drops to snowed-in Indian villages that the 1st Wing (which included the 11th Bombardment Squadron that would later move to Hamilton Field with their B-10 and B-12 bombers) flew during the blizzards of 1932-33.

In August 1932, he began the acquisition of portions of Rogers Dry Lake as a bombing and gunnery range for his units, an area which later became Edwards Air Force Base.

His men assisted in relief work after the Long Beach earthquake of March 10, 1933. He established camps for 3,000 boys of the Civilian Conservation Corps and organized a high profile series of aerial shows for Hollywood celebrities and Washington notables.

In 1934, in addition to commanding the politically-

mandated, but ill-starred Army Air Corps Mail Operation, he won his second MacKay trophy for leading a flight of ten Martin B-10B bombers on an 8,290 mile flight from Bolling Field to Fairbanks, Alaska, and back. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for this feat in 1937 despite his argument that the award should have gone to the other airmen who took part in the flight.

In 1935, the new Army Chief of Staff, General Malin Craig, brought Arnold back to Washington DC to serve as his assistant and chief of the Air Corps, wherein he became responsible for procurement and supply and dealing with the political problems associated there-

with. The political problems included a personal friction that developed between Hap and the White House press secretary Stephen Early, the military advisor Col. Edwin M. Watson and Major General Frank Andrews, the General Headquarters Air Force commander. (The GHqAF was independent of the Chief of the Air Corps for whom Arnold was now the assistant.) It was during this period that Arnold flew to California to be present at the dedication of the newly-constructed Hamilton Army Air Field. He was

impressed with the facilities and the area. (A suite under the Officer's Club was reserved for his use during his lifetime, and for a while thereafter for the use of his wife as a military courtesy. In his oral history interview recorded in June 2012, Carl Nielsen recounts seeing Arnold's internally customized B-17 parked in its reserved space at Hamilton Field in 1944.)

On September 28, 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt called a meeting of his top military advisors at the White House (including Arnold) at which he announced "I want airplanes – now – and lots of them." General Arnold would later cite this meeting as the turning point in the development of the modern air force. This was the time the B-17 Flying Fortress was being developed despite a tide of military opinion that opposed the huge four engine bombers in favor of the twin engine B-10. In addition, there was still resentment in the Navy over the demise of the battleship's invincibility, and the organization and command chains relating to aircraft were still fluid. F.D.R. had in effect given the direction to create an air force that was not an appendage of another service.

Arnold went on to become the Army Air Force commanding general (with 5 stars) and the Air Force

commanding general (when that unit became a separate service on June 20, 1941), again with 5 stars. He supervised the incredible expansion of our air power in WWII. In December 1941, the U.S. had 1,100 operational planes; by the end of WWII Arnold had accepted delivery of 229,230 aircraft. U.S. production went from 2,000 planes per year prewar to 4,000 per month by late 1942. Pilot training jumped from 300 men per year to 50,000 per year by mid-1942. Hap hastened the development of fast, heavily armed fighter planes such as the Lockheed P-38 "Lightning" and the Republic P-47 "Thunderbolt." He encouraged the development of heavy bombers such as the B-17 "Flying Fortress," and its successor the B-29 "Super Fortress" in 1939 (for which he developed the air force's performance specifications). He also hastened production of lighter tactical bombers such as the twin engine Douglas A-20, the North American B-25 "Mitchell," and the Martin B-26 "Marauder."

He agreed to take on 50 experienced women pilots "on a trial basis" to staff the USAAF Ferrying Command, thereby starting the WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilots) program. He witnessed the introduction of the jet plane, a development he favored.

In May 1941, He selected Robert Crawford's words and music entitled "The Army Air Corps" as the flying service anthem:

"Off we go into the wild blue yonder
Climbing high into the Sun;
Here they come, zooming to meet our thunder
At 'em boys, give 'em the gun!
Down we dive, spouting our flame from under,
Off with one helluva roar,
We live in fame, or go down in flame, hey !
Nothing'll stop the Army Air Corps."

On the morning following V-J day, (August 16, 1945) Hap Arnold addressed his staff, where he stated these thoughts, "The next war may be fought by airplanes with no men in them at all. It certainly will be

fought with planes so far superior to those that we have now that there will be no basis for comparison. Take everything you've learned about aviation in the war, throw it out the window and let's get to work on tomorrow's aviation. It will be different from anything the world has ever seen." (This shows how deeply Arnold absorbed Mitchell's philosophy. Mitchell, in addition to prophesying the ultimate superiority of air power over surface forces, had predicted the aerial invasion of Pearl Harbor in 1925. In 1945 Arnold foresaw the era of Predator drone warfare.)



B-29 Superfortress

Between 1943 and 1945 Hap made at least 9 trips to the combat theaters to assess effects and solve problems with supply and conflicting military disputes. Due largely to the strains of the job and the travel he suffered 4 heart attacks severe enough to require hospitalization. On June 16, 1945, following the surrender of Germany he relinquished command of the 12th Air Force to General Curtis LeMay. That same year he directed the founding of the RAND Corporation think tank "to connect military planning with research and development decisions." (It has enlarged its mandate since then.) He left active duty on February 28, 1946, but his official retirement date is June 30, 1946. He suffered his fifth heart attack in January 1948 which hospitalized him for three months.



Henry Harley Arnold died at his home in Sonoma, California, on January 15, 1950. He is buried in Section 34 at the Arlington National Cemetery. His body was flown from Hamilton Air Force base to Washington D.C. in 1950, with full military honors. He was survived by three sons, Henry Harley Arnold, Jr. (born 1939), William Bruce Arnold (born 1943) and David Lee Arnold (born 1949). All three are West Point graduates who earned the rank of colonel; the youngest two as United States Air Force officers. He was also survived by his wife, Bee, who was reputed to have utilized the reserved quarters under the Officer's Club after Hap's death. Their home in retirement in Sonoma, California, off Arnold Drive (which was named for Hap) is still existent, although much of the original grounds has been sold and developed by others into residences

Thanks to the cooperation of the Sonoma Valley Museum, there is a special exhibit at the Hamilton Field History Museum honoring Henry Harley Arnold, his life and achievements. The museum is open afternoons on Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday from 12 to 4 p.m. Admission is free, and the public is welcome.

[This article is primarily extracted from the following sources:]

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