

A Mini-History of Naval Weather & Oceanography Rev: 3-8-97

Since the turn of the century enlisted weather observers and forecasters have been an invaluable support to the success of Naval Aviation. The roots of Naval weather were in LT Matthew Fontaine Maury's first marine temperature, wind and current chart in 1846. The Aerographers Mate rating celebrates its 73rd year of official service on 1 July 1997. Scientific break throughs in theory & instrumentation, world wars and internal realignment finds their role to be more vital than ever.

The First Naval Aviator - Eugene Ely made Naval Aviation history on 14 Nov, 1910 when he launched his aircraft from the deck of USS Birmingham, anchored at Hampton Roads, Va. Naval aviation was born. The aviators, confident, cocky and daring, soon became the stuff of legends as they took to the skies in their flimsy "flying machines."



NAVAL AVIATOR

A Science Emerges - As the fledgling community grew, new breeds of Navy men emerged to support it. One of these was another type of aviation man whose specialty would prove to be a science as new and exciting as flight itself. It was a science based on knowledge of the atmosphere and upper air weather patterns surrounding and supporting the airborne structures. It was a science so different that a name was coined to describe it, aerography. The terms aerography and aerographer for Naval Officers were widely used thereafter, until Aerologist replaced them. In Nov 1919 when the terms Aerology replaced aerography and Aerographer referred to technical weather personnel rather than those of a professional status.

Such is the American penchant for larger than life heroes that the Naval aviator became immortalized on recruiting posters and Hollywood celluloid, bona fide matinee idols in their flowing silk scarves, leather bomber jackets and goggles. The Navy weatherman, on the other hand, was

relegated to a decade of relative obscurity. Known variously as aerologists, meteorologists, aviation specialists or derisively, as "weather guessers". It would be more than 12 years from that first flight and six years after creation of a weather officer specialty before enlisted naval personnel would have a rate to call their own.

It's a Gas - On 26 July 1917 the Army-Navy Airship Board endorsed a proposal for the experimental production of helium. Production of helium in this country gave us a virtual monopoly while other nations were forced to use the more dangerous hydrogen gas for lighter than air craft and for upper air soundings. At this point the gas was a "lab curiosity" which cost \$2,500 per cu. foot.

First Weather Related A/C Accident - On 17 Sept 1917 a basket borne observer in a kite balloon launched from USS Huntington was threatened by an onrushing squall. Strong wind gusts caused a hard, uncontrolled contact with the sea. Despite frantic efforts to haul in the balloon the observer was suddenly underwater in the rigging. Quick action saved this first weather related aircraft accident from being a fatality.

Greens - On 7 Sept 1917 A forestry green winter flying uniform, of the same design as the summer (khaki) uniform was authorized for all officers assigned to aviation duty.

"Wheels" with Wings - The enlisted forerunners of aerographer's mates were quartermasters with an aviation specialty for the most part. Formal instruction in aviation-related courses for the Navy was first carried out by Dr. Alexander G. McAdie of Harvard University's Blue Hill Observatory. He insisted that the course work be conducted at the post-graduate level in Aerography rather than meteorology for his second class Petty Officer students. "The distinction between meteorology and aerography may not ineptly be illustrated by saying that the former is a study of the atmosphere from the standpoint of the automobilist while the latter is from the viewpoint of the aviator," he noted (quote from America's Weather Warriors, by Charles C. Bates and John F. Fuller) McAdie's friend, then Secretary of the Navy, Franklin D. Roosevelt, got McAdie a naval commission as an LCDR so that he might institute a navy aerography course. The Navy Aerological Organization was created with McAdie's enrollment on 1 Feb 1918.

Birth of the Pibal - On 28 Nov 1917 tests began at Fort Omaha NE which entailed the observation of an ascending balloon and subsequent plotting to determine winds aloft. Tests were concluded on 17 Dec 1917 and judged to be a success. The procedure was labeled a pibal.