

# FOUR AIRPLANES OFF ON ALASKAN FLIGHT

## Army Machines Start for Alaska on Most Difficult Feat in History of Aeronautics.

### NOME AND BACK, 9,000 MILES

#### Experimental Army Route to Asia Over Unexplored Territory to Prove Commercial Value.

Four army air service airplanes hopped into air at Mitchel Field, Mineola, at 12:33 o'clock yesterday afternoon, and after circling the field once, pointed their noses into the northwest and sped swiftly out of sight of 1,500 well wishers who had gathered to see them off on the first leg of an adventurous air trail blazing flight to Nome, Alaska, and return, a total distance of about 9,000 miles.

Three of the four planes, flying close together, alighted at Erie, Pa., first stop officially set, and 350 miles from the take-off, at 5:20 P. M.

Plane 1, in command of Captain Clair Street, leader of the expedition, was reported by the others to have been lost in the fog soon after New York City was passed. A telegram from him to Lieutenant C. C. Nutt, pilot of Plane 2, said that he had been forced to descend at Elmhurst, near Scranton, Pa., because of a broken axle. The message said that Captain Street would arrive in Erie tomorrow, and directed his fellow-adventurers to wait for him.

The fliers who reached their destination went at once to the Lawrence Hotel in Erie, where they said their journey was without incident. All were looking toward the near future when they will be winging over the Canadian Rockies and over the great tract to the south of the Tanana River, which, 170 miles long and 65 miles wide, never has been surveyed and is practically inaccessible except to birds—and hardy aviators.

"The big purpose of this expedition is to demonstrate the usefulness of the airplane commercially," Captain Street said just before the start yesterday.

Other purposes are to establish an aerial route to the northwest corner of the American continent so that should military considerations require, it would be possible to move the army air service units to Asia by direct flight, and to photograph inaccessible areas in Alaska, which never have been mapped.

The take-off for the long flight originally had been arranged for 10 A. M. yesterday, but showers forced a postponement until 12:33. The four planes taxied across Mitchel Field, one behind the other, with Captain Street in the van. They shot into the air at about two-second intervals, and, grouping, swept around their home field, gradually gaining height, while the spectators below waved hands, hats and handkerchiefs, and motion-picture cameras were busily preserving the scene in celluloid.

#### Experimental Route to Asia.

Colonel William Mitchell, head of the Department of Training and Operation of the Army Air Service, made the following statement concerning the purposes of the expedition in the morning:

"The New York to Nome flight initiates the development of aerial routes from north to south across the American Continent and eventual feelers from this route to the eastern part of Asia and a connection with air routes across Asia to Europe. It is the first overland flight of any magnitude which we have attempted across the territory of another country.

"For a great part of the distance this route runs across Canada. The Canadian authorities have offered us every facility for the carrying out of our plan and its completion. Each landing place has been carefully selected.

"Supplies of gasoline, oil and spare parts have been distributed, maps provided, also complete instructions for each part of the work. In this way each part of the Army Air Service has been made to function in a way that is analogous to the preparation of an expedition for war. In other words, it is a manoeuvre of our whole service.

"The possibilities of transportation by air in the far North are very great, because the cargoes of furs, gold and other precious metals are comparatively small and their value is very great.

"All equipment for the expedition was manufactured in this country. In this way it is the first expedition in

which entirely American equipment and American trained men are being used.

#### Photographic Maps to be Made.

"We will not try to make it with any special rapidity. Every means of gaining useful information for flying will be obtained on the way. When Alaska has been reached photographic mapping will be carried out. The area which will be worked over in the Upper Yukon would require three years work by the geological survey and an absolute minimum cost of \$10,000. We believe we can carry out this work in ten hours flying time at a cost of about \$1,500."

Captain F. H. Moos, commanding officer at Mitchel Field, said the flight planned was the most difficult in the history of aeronautics.

"Although the Alaskan flight is somewhat shorter than that between London and Australia," he said, "in my opinion it is a more difficult endeavor, and, if successfully completed, will mean far more to aeronautics. The distance from Mineola to Nome and return is approximately 9,000 miles. This is about the same distance traversed by the Martin bomber in its 'round the rim of the United States' flight last year. The 'round the rim' flight was made over territory known to aviators and at no time were the flyers out of touch with sources of supply.

#### Flight Over Wilderness.

"The Alaskan flight is all land flying, while the flight of the NC-4, which crossed the Atlantic, was all marine flying. The NC-4 made the first flight over an extensive and wholly unknown—from the point of view of aviators—body of water. The Alaskan flyers will pass over many thousands of miles of land which are scarcely known even to surface travelers. Captain Street and his men will be compelled for a great part of the distance to fly at an altitude of 14,000 feet and they will be compelled to encounter climatic conditions which have never yet been faced by flyers except for brief periods of time."

#### Message to Amundsen.

Captain Street carries with him messages of congratulation to Roald Amundsen, who is expected to arrive in Rome early in August after circumnavigating the globe north of "63" by negotiating the Northeast Passage. Amundsen went through the Northwest Passage in 1908. The messages were:

From Vilhjalmur Stefansson, President of the Explorers' Club: "Have just heard of this opportunity to send message to you by airplane. On behalf of Explorers' Club, New York, congratulate you on good work already accomplished and wish you continued safety and success to the end of your voyage. (Signed) Vilhjalmur Stefansson."

From Henry Fairfield Osborn, President of the American Museum of Natural History: "The American Museum of Natural History welcomes your return from your great journey through the Northeast Passage and incidentally the circumnavigation of the Northern globe. We send our heartfelt congratulations on this the third great achievement of your life as an explorer. We trust that this finds yourself and members of your vallant party in good health and strength, and that you have not suffered any losses. As soon as we learn the details of your route, we shall map it on our Polar globe. With best personal wishes and those of my scientific colleagues in the American Museum, I am faithfully yours (signed) Henry Fairfield Osborn."

Captain Street carried with him from Mitchell Field copies of THE NEW YORK TIMES for Thursday, July 15. They will be delivered by him to the editors of the following newspapers: Erie Dispatch, Erie, Pa.; Grand Rapids Herald, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Courier News, Fargo, N. D.; International, Portal, N. D.; Saskatoon Star, Saskatoon, Sask.; Bulletin, Edmonton, Alberta; Citizen, Prince George, B. C.; Sentinel, Wrangell, Alaska; Star, Whitehorse, Y. T.; News, Dawson, Y. T.; Alaska Citizen, Fairbanks, Alaska; Nugget, Nome, Alaska. Also copies will be delivered to Governor Thomas B. Riggs of Alaska at Juneau.