



# Hostile Skies

A combat history of the American Air Service  
in World War I

di James J. Hudson - 1968

STRALCIO

1918 – Cooperazione tra istruttori italiani e piloti americani  
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## *Training for the Air War* ↖ ↗ 37

As the American training program picked up momentum, Cazaux and St. Jean de Mont were hard pressed to keep up with the gunnery instruction needs. All pursuit pilots trained in France, and almost all trained in the United States, had to be provided with gunnery instruction; observers and gunners from observation and bombardment squadrons had to be given firing practice. Eventually a small amount of closely regulated shooting was allowed in areas adjacent to the schools at Issoudun, Tours, Clermont-Ferrand, Chatillon, and Souge. Ground gunnery also was instituted at all principal schools.

(\*) In order to relieve some of the pressure on the two major aerial gunnery facilities, a school was opened at **Furbara**, Italy, in the spring of 1918. At **Furbara**, gunnery training was on the 13-meter Nieuport, with a Lewis gun mounted on the upper wing. Lieutenant Leland M. Carver, of Detroit, Michigan, later a top pilot with the 90th Aero Squadron, described some of the difficulties at **Furbara**: “Ground school lectures were given by Italian officers in French which I translated into English for the Americans.”<sup>39</sup> A shortage of machines and the distance from other training centers further com-

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(\*) Traduzione curata da Francesco Viz

Al fine di alleviare un pò la pressione sulle due principali strutture di tiro aereo, nella primavera del 1918 fu aperta una scuola a Furbara, in Italia, l'addestramento al tiro avveniva sul Nieuport 13 metri, con una mitragliatrice Lewis montata sull'ala superiore. Il Luogotenente Leland M. Carver, di Detroit, Michigan, uno dei piloti top del 90th Aero Squadron, ha descritto alcune delle difficoltà a Furbara: “*Le lezioni di scuola a terra sono state tenute da ufficiali italiani in francese che ho tradotto in inglese per gli americani*”. Una carenza di macchine e la distanza da altri centri di formazione ha ulteriormente complicato le cose, e il progetto è stato abbandonato dopo che a Furbara solo due classi (per un totale di 52 piloti) avevano completato il loro programma.

plicated matters, and the **Furbara** project was abandoned after only two classes (a total of fifty-two pilots) had completed their program.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to being trained at the pursuit schools at Issoudun and the 9th AIC in England, American fighter pilots were also trained at two other centers. The 4th AIC at Avord, the largest French flying school, was used for the training of surplus officers and cadets. The 6th AIC at Pau was probably the very first of all French training sites used by Americans, for unofficial training started there in the late summer of 1916—before the United States entered the war. Since many of the pilots produced at Pau became members of the LaFayette Escadrille, the school had a distinguished reputation.<sup>41</sup>

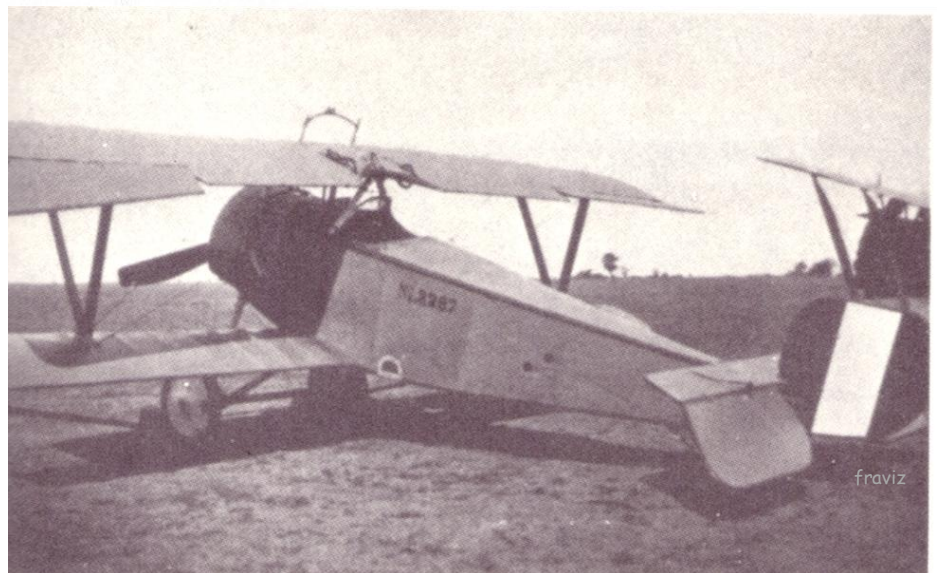
Although the observation pilot and his observer received far less publicity than the pursuit pilot, they actually served as important a part in the ultimate victory. In fact, in the view of General Mason M. Patrick, “the work of the observer and the observation pilot is the most important and far-reaching which an air service operating with an army is called upon to perform.”<sup>42</sup> The duties of the observation team, especially the observer, were very complex. For example, it was the observer who had to familiarize himself with the sometimes featureless terrain over which he was flying, operate a camera, a radio and other signaling devices, direct the pilot, continually observe the tactical situation on the ground, jot down notes for his later reports, adjust artillery fire, and frequently to use a “pair of Lewis machine guns in a 100-mph wind stream against enemy pursuit planes.” In the words of a recent writer, “It should not be forgotten that the men who wore the single wing were the successors of the Cavalry scouts of the past, and upon their judgment and powers of observation sometimes depend the conduct of battles involving many thousands of soldiers.”<sup>43</sup> fraviz

Training of observers in the AEF commenced in the autumn of 1917 upon the arrival of the first brigades of field artillery in France. Observers were detailed from these brigades, and the first air work was given by a French observation squadron stationed at Le Valdahon. This training was soon supplemented by an observer school at Amanty and by qualified artillery observers sent to serve with French squadrons at the front. Some of these men received a severe initiation into combat. One of them, Lieutenant Fred A.

Italian instructors and American trainees at gunnery school, **Furbara**, Italy, June, 1918. Left to right: Italian instructor, Lt. Watkins, Lt. Carter, Italian instructor, L. H. "Tiny" Wingate, Red Foster, Schulz, George Baxter. *Courtesy Leland M. Carver.*



Savoia-Verduccia (with plywood fuselage), Italian observation plane, **Furbara**, Italy, June, 1918. *Courtesy Leland M. Carver.*



13-meter French Nieuport used by American pilots at gunnery school, **Furbara**, Italy, June, 1918. *Courtesy Leland M. Carver.*

people. Whenever his administrative duties allowed, he traveled to Rome, Turin, Milan, or Naples, making speeches to explain Wilson's war aims or urging the Italians to a greater war effort.<sup>37</sup> It is safe to say that the "Little Flower," who would one day be the mayor of New York City, did more than anyone else to harmonize relationships between the two nations.

Early in April, 1918, La Guardia arranged to have American pursuit pilots trained in aerial gunnery at **Furbara**, near Civitavecchia, on the coast a few miles north of Rome. The first class of twenty-five students entered the school on 24 April 1918, but because of a shortage of aircraft and other difficulties, the program was dropped in late September. Only fifty pilots received their gunnery instruction at **Furbara**.<sup>38</sup>

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A plan for giving American pilots advanced training in Caproni bombers proved more successful. In this program, conducted by Italian instructors at Foggia, the student started with the three-engine, CA-350, and then moved up to the more powerful CA-450 or CA-600. One of the American pilots, Lieutenant Frederick K. Weyerhaeuser, a Yale graduate and heir to a lumber empire, described some of the problems associated with the Caproni:

The big Fiat motor on the 600's . . . had the bad habit of catching fire when throttled down for glides or descents. The principal trick to flying a Caproni was getting off the ground. You had three throttles and would start opening the two side motors little by little until the plane had good speed on the ground. Sometimes the rear motor would stop without your knowing it, while you were getting the side motors open; which could of course be mighty serious if you had a load of bombs in a small field.<sup>39</sup>

Most of the work in the huge CA-600 took place at Malpensa, an Italian school northeast of Milan. By the end of the war over seventy-five Americans had qualified in the big trimotor Caproni.

During the spring of 1918, United States–Italian relations were strained over the disposition of American pilots trained in Italy. In arranging for their training, the U.S. government had made it quite clear that the fliers would remain under American control, and upon completion of their training they would be assigned wherever needed by American squadrons. After several pilots trained in Italy were sent north to France for duty, the Italians mounted a cam-