

CAF Liaison Squadron...

Although rarely recognized as such, Liaisons were combat aircraft. They were light and could fly low and slow, all the while evading both enemy and friendly fire...



To fly a Liaison ("L") plane with the Confederate Air Force requires either a great sense of humor or the ability to turn a deaf ear to those highly vocal detractors who always seem to be near at hand. Everyone, even those who fly BTs, delight in inquiring of the L-4 or L-5 pilot how many days it took to fly from, say San Antonio to Harlingen. But the Liaison Squadron is composed of hardy souls; they just shrug their shoulders and get on with the business of memorializing those whose wings boasted a large "L" in the middle of the shield.

Back in 1940, when the United States was gearing up for an as yet undeclared war, the government decided to give light aircraft a try as an observation machine. Until that time units designated as "Observation" had been flying the relatively high performance O-46, O-47 and O-52.

The latter was probably one of the ugliest, most ungainly looking machines ever to appear in the Air Corps inventory. Although excellent for photo recon missions, they were totally unsuitable for controlling artillery shoots or spotting enemy troops for the infantry.

The rapid expansion of the Air Corps during 1940 sent many young reserve officers from other branches into the ground echelons of the Air Corps which had previously felt that all it really needed were pilots and mechanics...the heck with the paper work. Jack Romerman of Oklahoma City, was one such recently activated ROTC artillery graduate assigned as adjutant to the freshly federalized 154th Observation Squadron of the Arkansas National Guard.

According to Romerman the "Hot Pilots" from the Guard had a little



Roger Bailey



Denton, Texas, October 1943 — primary training school operated for artillery liaison pilots. USAF Photograph

Right: February 1944, Pittsburgh, Kansas. 110 "L" planes on hand to train artillery spotter pilots. USAF Photo



Leather jacket patch and shoulder insignia of one of the first units to use an "L" plane, the Arkansas National Guard 154th Observation Squadron which was federalized in the summer of 1940. Houston

Primarily artillery spotters, the planes were also used as couriers, and for emergency supply drops and medical evacuation... A lifeline for the ordinary GI.



From front to back, an L-4, L-2, L-3 and an L-5. Sometimes known as "Grasshoppers," these versatile ships could take off and land on virtually any "semi-flat" surface.

Roger Beery



Cols Ray Durden and Ivan Peller with L-3B. Both men were WWII "L" pilots. Wes Kyle



Liaison Squadron meeting just before AIRSHO 84. Jim Fry

CAF Squadron formed to preserve the memory of a group of pilots who performed a vital and dangerous service

The Confederate Air Force "L" Squadron applied to Headquarters for recognition in January of 1981 with twenty nine members. Acceptance was granted in April, 1981 and the Squadron has been an active unit ever since participating in demonstrations throughout the country.

The CAF fleet of seven "L" planes is augmented by seventeen privately owned aircraft representing all six of the types manufactured and used by the United States during World War II plus a Feisler Storch. Six of the seven CAF aircraft are currently undergoing restoration in such diverse places as Memphis, Tennessee and Everett, Washington. The majority of the CAF planes are according to Chris Rakestraw who serves as Headquarters Liaison for the "L" Squadron, currently in various stages of restoration.

Of those CAF aircraft that have recently submitted reports to Col Rakestraw; Missouri Wing L-3B is now seventy percent restored. The L-2 assigned to the Evergreen Squadron is coming along nicely although a cross tube will have to be replaced in the rear of the fuselage. According to Evergreen Maintenance Officer Col Ray Gilber, the tube

was welded some time ago, by some unknown owner, but it had to be replaced. No one, it seems, wanted to fly an airplane with a warped fuselage, holding full right rudder at all times. There are four other CAF owned "L" planes currently undergoing restoration. They include the L-4, Mid-South Squadron, Memphis, Tennessee, the L-5 Dallas Fort Worth Wing, Dallas, Texas, also an L-5 at home with the Southern Minnesota Wing, St. Paul, Minnesota and members of the Arizona Wing are restoring an L-6 at Deer Valley Airport, near Phoenix, AZ.

"The purpose of the Squadron," said Squadron Leader Wesley Kyle of Uvalde, Texas, "is to honor, preserve and present to the public a much ignored group of pilots who performed a vital and dangerous service. "It was the GI Air Force," Kyle noted. "They were about the only airplanes the ordinary soldier ever saw."

The Squadron also gives members a central clearing house for exchanging information and data on the aircraft and tries to provide members with access to parts and supplies needed to keep the planes in the air. Now boasting eighty-one

members—as of October 31, 1984—the group has eight people who actually flew "L" planes during World War II.

"Our membership is pretty widespread," Kyle said. "Not only do we represent most of the United States, but we have members in Canada, France and New Zealand."

"One of our foremost projects is the compilation of restoration information which we freely supply to any who ask," Kyle continued. "We have even helped many people in England with their projects as well as several museums."

In addition to the restoration projects, the "L" Squadron is trying to compile records and personal recollections of those who flew light aircraft on their highly varied missions during the 1939—1945 conflict. The annual meeting of the Squadron is held one hour before pilot briefing at the Harlingen AIRSHO.

Although the Liaisons fly low and slow, close to both the crowd and the ground, they can brag that, unlike those who flew more high performance aircraft, "L" planes landed in the trees on purpose.

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