

**THE OUTSTANDING WW1 PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM BELONGING TO AN AMERICAN FIGHTER ACE OF 147TH AERO 'WHO SAID RATS' SQUADRON**



**THE GREAT WAR PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM BELONGING TO LIEUTENANT RALPH A. O'NEILL, AMERICAN FIGHTER ACE OF 147TH AERO 'WHO SAID RATS' SQUADRON**

This photo album, measuring 29 x 18.5cm, contains 247 photographs related to 147th Aero Squadron during the Great War. Photos ranging in size from 16.5 x 12cm to 6.5 x 4.2cm.

The photos detail the initial mustering of the unit in Fort Worth, Texas and follows them to the Western Front, the vast majority being taken during front line service. A very large number of the squadron's pilots are pictured, all of which are named, many with along notations regarding whether they received the Distinguished Service Cross or whether they were killed in action etc. Of these, a large number are fantastic shots of the pilots in the cockpits of or next to their aircraft; mainly Nieuport 28's or Spad XIII's. Many aircraft photos also include views of 147<sup>th</sup> Aero's the squadrons emblem of a terrier type dog with 'Who Said Rats' underneath. There are also a wide variety of other Allied aircraft including the SE5, Sia (Italian), Handley Page, Caproni Bomber, Caudron, Sopwith, and Curtis trainers. Captured German aircraft are also pictured, including the Hannover CLII's and Fokker DVII's, various crashes etc; again, all labelled. Also a small number of squadron camp scenes, squadron transport, a lot of pilots as singles or in groups. Other photos (approximately 55) that are non 147<sup>th</sup> related include Anti-aircraft batteries, battlefield scenes, POW's and burial of the dead at the cemetery at Verdun etc.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/147th\\_Aero\\_Squadron](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/147th_Aero_Squadron)

**LIEUTENANT RODOLFO (RALPH) AMBROSE O'NEILL**

Rodolfo (Ralph) Ambrose O'Neill (1896-1980) was born in Durango, Mexico of Irish and Mexican parentage. He had a distinguished military career and is considered a pioneer in the field of

commercial aviation. During the Great War, he served as a fighter pilot in 147th Aero Squadron, flying Nieuport 28's and Spad XIII's fighters. Taking part in 103 patrols between July and November 1918, earning the nickname "The Snake" for his daring, unconventional manoeuvres against numerically superior enemy forces. By Wars end, he was an Ace with 5 aerial victories (some sources say 6) and several probable's but unconfirmed and was also was a highly decorated, earning the Distinguished Service Cross with two oak leaves and the French Croix de Guerre with palm:

Distinguished Service Cross Citation:

*"The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to First Lieutenant (Air Service) Ralph Ambrose O'Neill, United States Army Air Service, for extraordinary heroism in action while serving with 147th Aero Squadron, 1st Pursuit Group, U.S. Army Air Service, A.E.F., near Chateau-Thierry, France, 2 July 1918. Lieutenant O'Neill and four other pilots attacked 12 enemy battle planes. In a violent battle within the enemy's lines they brought down three German planes, one of which was credited to Lieutenant O'Neill."*



2nd Distinguished Service Cross (oakleaf) Citation:

*"The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting a Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of a Second Award of the Distinguished Service Cross to First Lieutenant (Air Service) Ralph Ambrose O'Neill, United States Army Air Service, for extraordinary heroism in action while serving with 147th Aero Squadron, 1st Pursuit Group, U.S. Army Air Service, A.E.F., near Chateau-Thierry, France: On 5 July 1918, First Lieutenant O'Neill led three other pilots in battle against eight German pursuit planes near Chateau-Thierry. He attacked the leader, opening fire at about 150 yards, and closing up to 30 yards range. After a quick and decisive fight the enemy aircraft fell in flames. He then turned on three other machines that were attacking him from the rear and brought one of them down. The other five enemy planes were driven away."*

3rd Distinguished Service Cross (2nd oakleaf) Citation:

*"The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting a Second Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster in lieu of a Third Award of the*



*Distinguished Service Cross to First Lieutenant (Air Service) Ralph Ambrose O'Neill, United States Army Air Service, for extraordinary heroism in action while serving with 147th Aero Squadron, 1st Pursuit Group, U.S. Army Air Service, A.E.F., near Fresnes, France, 24 July 1918: Lieutenant O'Neill, with four other pilots, engaged 12 enemy planes discovered hiding in the sun. Leading the way to an advantageous position by a series of bold and skillful maneuvers. Lieutenant O'Neill shot down the leader of the hostile formation. The other German planes then closed in on him, but he climbed to a position of vantage above them and returned to the fight and drove down another plane. In this encounter he not only defeated his opponents in spite of overwhelming odds against him, but also enabled the reconnaissance plane to carry on its work unmolested."*

French Croix de Guerre with Bronze Palm

*"Fierce combat pilot with unfailing courage. On July 5, 1918, he destroyed two enemy planes. On July 2, he attacked with his patrol a formation of twelve enemy battle planes and officially shot one down. On July 24, he shot down a new adversary and put to flight a second after a fierce combat."*

Aerial Victories both confirmed and unconfirmed:

- 1) 2 July 1918 Fokker DVII - confirmed
- 2) 5 July 1918 Pfalz DIII - confirmed
- \* 16 July 1918 2 seater (Probable) - later confirmed
- 16 July 1918 Fokker - probable but unconfirmed
- 3) 24 July 1918 Pfalz or Fokker DVII - confirmed
- 4) 24 July 1918 Pfalz or Fokker DVII - confirmed
- 3 October 1918 Halberstadt 2 seater – probable but unconfirmed
- 5) 10 October 1918 Rumpler C - confirmed

In October 1920, O'Neill was hired in by the Mexican government pretty much to set up a functional Mexican Air Force (O'Neill being of Mexican heritage), which up to that point was pretty rag tag with no standardization, few pilots, no proper training, units and outdated aircraft. O'Neil was made Chief of the Department of Aviation and in the early years whilst trying to buy in aircraft, he, or "Jefe Rodolfo" as he was then known, would present himself to manufacturers and foreign leaders under titles such as "Major-General" in order to garner prominence and legitimacy. He was also the first to introduce the term 'Fuerza Aerea Mexicana' or FAM; basically naming the Mexican Air Service, which still remains its name. However his role was not just of an organisational nature and during 1923-4, he flew combat missions against Adolfo de la Huerta's rebellion. Remaining in this post until late 1925, he had by that time attained the rank of General

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ralph\\_Ambrose\\_O'Neill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ralph_Ambrose_O'Neill)

In 1929, O'Neill established the New York, Rio and Buenos Aires Line of commercial aircraft, set up an 8000 mile route between Argentina and the United States, carrying the mails. He also served his country admirably in World War II, inventing an improved exhaust system for tanks which enabled them to prevail in desert warfare.

In 1973 he wrote "*A Dream of Eagles*," which was about the New York, Rio and Buenos Aires Line. O'Neill was buried with full military honors at Holy Cross Cemetery in Menlo Park, California.

The following website gives an excellent detailed account of O'Neil's WW1 service:

[https://gsr.park.edu/service\\_members/ralph-ambrose-oneill/](https://gsr.park.edu/service_members/ralph-ambrose-oneill/)



1. Lieut. A. G. Jones, D.F.C.



24. Lieut. Hubert and Baily



10. Lieut. Brown



15. Operations office, 14th Squadron



3. Lieut. B. Wells



12. Lieut. Powell, Adjutant



14. Lieut. Baily, D.F.C.



13. Lieut. Roberts and New



6. Lieut. Almond



16. Lieut. Simon, D.F.C.



17. Lieut. Snowden



20. Squadron leaving Port Moresby



9. Lieut. Hubert



22. Lieut. Bannister (Capt)



8. Lieut. Bailey, D.F.C.



2. Major Powell and British Officer







37 Lieut. E. Porter



38 Lieut. Simon



39 Lieut. Rutherford



40 Deck Board Hall



Burning Sped, Lieut. White (W.A.S.)  
Killed Nov. 5, 1918



Fuselage Blueport 28



Remains of German Junker  
brought down in flames



39 Lieut. Reed Chambers



38 Lieut. Douglas Campbell



39 Sopwith Triplane



38 Sopwith Dolphin



38 Caproni three motor bomber



37 Caudron R. 11



38 Handley Page light bomber



38 Boat



34 Assembly, Blueport 28



41 Lieut. C. F. Porter



40 Lieut. Realy



217 Lieut. Robertson



219 Gas masks



221 Gas masks



216 Capt. Weisner



220 Shell baskets



222 White & Simon



58 Front view of Sped  
showing machine gun's  
muzzles



57 Major H. B. Hartney



56 Rickenbacker with wing of Blimp  
wrecked in flight



61 Lieut. R. Wells



60 Lieut. Gilbert White  
Killed Oct. 10th, 1918



59 Lts. O'Neill and  
Jones, D.S.O.





27. Lieut. "Bodie" Hickenhauser



2. Major G. H. Russell, Commanding



31. Lieut. Kiefer



4. Lieut. R. A. O'Sullivan, D.C.



147th Aero Squadron



18. Lieut. Stevens, Killed, Chateau Thierry, July, 1918



16. Red Landing, Durtie Training



15. Lieut. Brown



26. Canadian Training Curtis



18. Lieut. Willard



19. Lieut. Lawrence, Killed, Chateau Thierry, July, 1918



22. Lieut. Ashenden, Interned, Switzerland, July, 1918



33. Wreck of his two-seater



30. Mobile Repair Shop



34. Parsons wrecked, Foggia, Italy



27. Wreck in Training



28. Lieut. Roberts lining up machine gun



31. Reconnaissance Flight





111 Ruins on the Morns



110 Wreck, Sopwith two seater



109 Caudron G 4 wreck



108 Caudron G 4 wreck



176 Sop. Camel



177 Gun turret, British DH 9



160 Wreck Nieuport 28



178



179 Wreck Nieuport 28



106 Wrecked Sopwith, two seater



107 Wrecked Sopwith, two seater



99 Wrecked S E 5



98 Wrecked Sopwith Camel



97 Bad Landing S E 5, British



182 Wreck Nieuport 28



183 Helmsman, wings of plane stripped on flight



184 Issoudun



182



184 Machine guns, Nieuport 28



186 Lieut. Brotherton, killed Oct. 10, 1918



100 Wrecked Caudron G 4



102 Wrecked American DH. 4



101 Wrecked S E 5



96 Wrecked S E 5



95 Wrecked British DH. 9



94 Wrecked



93 Bad wreck, British DH. 9



92 Farman taking off



90 Assembly Nieuport 28



91 Italian SIA









43 Lieut. Simon



44 Lieut. Cox



52 Lieut. Peake



51 Lieut. Beble



50 Lieut. Beble



67 Lts. Willard, O'Neill, & L. Porter



70 Lts. James, Robertson, K. Porter, Simon, McDermott, Bronson and Beble



69 Lts. Harman, Meissner and Jones



223 Nieuport 28



225 White & Simon



227 Lieut. Jones



224 Spad



226



228 Major LaBarry's Grave



229 Farnon



231 Lieut. Abernathy



233 Captured Hanoverian



74 Meissner and Harman



73 Officers of 14th Aero Squadron



230 Entrance to Verdun



232 Nieuport 28



234 Morane Perceval



72



71 Lts. Jones, White and O'Neill



64 Lieut. McDermott after crashup



63 Lieut. Simonds



62 Lieut. Simonds



68 Lt. White (Killed Oct. 10, 1918) Lts. Jones and Beble



65 Lieut. C.P. Porter



66 Lieut. Andrews





95. Keesha Rex Major Anthony's Currier



96. Major Anthony's Currier



97. Capt. Rose



98. Bioplane 28



99. Bioplane, Bioplane 27



100. Captured Bioplane



101. Bioplane, Bioplane, Bioplane 28



102. Capt. Rose



103. Capt. Rose



104. French military craft factory



105. Capt. Rose



106. Capt. Rose



107. Bioplane, Bioplane



108. Captured Bioplane



109. Capt. Rose



110. Bioplane



111. Captured German Fokker, setting out for



112. Bioplane



113. Bioplane



114. Bioplane



115. Bioplane



116. American military craft factory



117. Bioplane, Bioplane



118. Bioplane



119. Bioplane



## PILOTS PHOTOGRAPHED IN ALBUM

As noted, there are a large number of images of pilots in this album, the vast majority being of 147<sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron including all of 147<sup>th</sup> Aero's aces, many multiple times; Lt W W White - 8 Victories, Lt R O'Neill - 6 Victories, Lt K L Porter - 6 Victories, Lt F M Simonds - 5 Victories, Lt J A Healy - 5 Victories and Capt J A Meissener 4 (8) Victories.

Other 147<sup>th</sup> Aero pilots who's images appear, again many multiple times, include; Lt A H Jones – 4 Victories , Lt G A S Robertson – 1 Victory, Lt L C Simon – 2 Victories, Lt W P Muther, Lt J H Stevens – 1 Victory – KIA, Lt G J Brew, Lt G G Willard, Lt Lawrence – KIA, Major G H Bonnell – original squadron commander, Lt J F Ashenden – Interned Switzerland, Lt C E Cox, Lt E E Peake, Lt J C Raible – 2 Victories, Lt E T Harman, Lt T C Bronson– 1 Victory, Lt M O Parry – 1 Victory, Lt T J Abernathy – 3 Victories, Lt Andrews, Lt C W McDermott– 3 Victories, Lt O B Myers– 2 Victories, Lt W E Brotherton – 3 Victories – KIA, Lt C P Porter – 4 Victories, Lt J P Rowe, Lt C C Olive and Lt E Vadnais.

There are also several photos of US fighter pilots from other squadrons, especially from 94<sup>th</sup> Aero (Hat in Ring) Squadron which along with 147, 27 and 95<sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron's, formed 1<sup>st</sup> Pursuit Group; These include several of America's greatest ace; Lt Eddie Rickenbacker – 26 Victories, who is shown in four photos, two of which are larger sized. Also Lt R Chambers – 7 Victories, Lt D Campbell - 6 Victories. Also Major H Hartney – 7 Victories, 27<sup>th</sup> Aero and 1<sup>st</sup> Pursuit Group commander



Condition: the album itself is a little delicate, the album pages being made of black card paper, which was extremely commonly used in US albums of the time but with age becomes brittle to some degree. All pages are complete and present but are detached from the binding as is the front cover. However, the condition of the photos is very good as can be seen from the pictures in the listing. Please note



though, these photos have been taken with a digital camera, not scanned so they are not quite as sharp as in reality – to show the difference, several single photos have been scanned and are sharper; these images have no black background.

Note: the listing PDF shows mostly the directly aviation pages in the album but as noted there are other pages with battlefield shots etc but as can be seen, the vast majority of the 247 are of US fighter pilots and aircraft. On the PDF, each shot is of an entire page, so if it's a large photo, there is one large photo on that page, these measuring 16.5 x 12cm on average; these mainly of pilots in cockpits etc. If the shot shows 4-6 photos, these photos average 6.5 x 4.2cm. Lieutenant O'Neill is of course featured in many photos.



Content wise, this is a superb and rare US fighter aces album, comprehensively depicting service in one of America's finest fighter squadron's of the great war. It is certainly the best of the many WW1 US aviation albums to so far come through my hands.

The album itself was originally part of a group of items of O'Neill's, including his Spad's propellor/clock display (also listed by Jager Medals), a uniform, miniature awards and documents, sold as part of the Carisella collection in 2005, which included numerous high profile WW1 aviation items.