

THE WW1 PROPELLOR AND AIRCRAFT CLOCK DISPLAY MADE FROM A US 147TH AERO SQUADRON SPAD XIII FIGHTER BELONGING TO A 5 VICTORY ACE DAMAGED AFTER COMBAT IN 1918



A wooden propeller display made from parts of Lieutenant Ralph O'Neill's 147th Aero Squadron Spad XIII fighter after it was damaged after a combat patrol

Each propeller blade has an S.F.A. decal applied, these standing for 'Société Fabriques Aeronautique', above which has been cut a rectangular hole which fits onto a protruding block secured by a wooden peg. Together this forming a letter "H" and measures 18" x 18" x 7" once assembled. The centre hub has a French aircraft cockpit clock from O'Neill's Spad inserted, this marked 'Allions à Versailles' and 'Propriété de l'Aviation Militaire' to the clock face. The glass has been replaced by Perspex and the second hand is missing. It is not clear whether the clock was damaged in the crash or not but does not appear to be in working order.

The hub itself has been cut through with stamps 'SFA', 'W I', to the top retained and '2223' and '54153' to the rear. To the rear, there is the remains of a partial paper label applied which originally recounted a story associated with this relic. This it is not really readable, except for a handful of words.

Along with this is an attractive 26 x 20.5cm contemporary silvered metal picture frame with small WW1 US pilot wings to the top; presumably something veteran pilots could purchase post war. In this is a modern copy photo of O'Neill after the award of his first DSC and oakleaf. Additionally brass & wood membership plaque for the Quiet Birdmen (QB) organization, this the same size as the picture frame.



This propeller display was original part of a larger group of items of O'Neill's, including his photograph album (also for sale by Jager), a uniform, miniature award and documents, sold as part of the Carisella collection in 2005, which included numerous high profile WW1 aviation items. This item was described as:

"..aviation relic made from sections of O'Neill's propeller with French clock from his Spad fighter mounted to it; O'Neill's two-page statement relating the circumstances following a combat patrol which resulted in the construction of the relic."

Unfortunately this statement has been mislaid since its sale in 2005. However going through Squadron record's may identify which combat O'Neill's Spad was severely damaged or

written off. 147th Squadron only used Spad XIII's operationally from mid-August 1918 and O'Neill was sent on leave due to combat stress about a week prior to the armistice so it must have been between these dates.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/147th_Aero_Squadron



Lt. Ralph A. O'Neill: Archive of the 147th Aero Squadron Flying Ace.

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 unflinching 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

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/



