

History of the 115th Photographic Section, California National Guard 1926-1939

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40th DIVISION AVIATION

115th PHOTO SECTION

✓ 40th Division Aviation (formerly 40th Division Air Service)

✓ 115th Photo Section, California National Guard

✓ Reference: Adjutant General Files

✓ Location: Los Angeles, Los Angeles County

✓ Mustered in May 3, 1926 *

✓ Redesignated Sept. 10, 1926 **

✓ Redesignated Jan. 25, 1927 ***

✓ Redesignated Feb. 13, 1929 ****

Commanding Officers

<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Commission</u>
George C. Sherwood, 2nd Lieut. (Transferred from 115th Obser.Sqd. and assigned to Command 115th Photo Section May 3, 1926) (Promoted, 1st Lieut.A.C.Mar.21,1927)	Feb. 8, 1926	Feb. 17, 1926

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- ✓ * 115th Photo Section, 40th Division Air Service, accepted and mustered into State Service May 3, 1926. Adjutant General Report, 1920-1926, Page 47
- ✓ ** 40th Division Air Service, redesignated 40th Division Air Corps, Sept. 10, 1926. General Orders, 1926, A.G.O. General Order No. 25, dated Sept. 10, 1926.
- ✓ *** 40th Division Air Corps, redesignated 40th Division Air Service Jan. 25, 1927. General and Special Orders and Circulars, 1927, A.G.O. Circular No. 4, dated Jan. 25, 1927.
- ✓ **** 40th Division Air Service, redesignated 40th Division Aviation, February 13, 1929. General and Special Orders and Circulars, 1929, A.G.O. Circular No. 6, dated Feb. 13, 1929.

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40th DIVISION AVIATION

115th PHOTO SECTION

Commanding Officers (Continued)

<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Commission</u>
George C. Sherwood, 1st Lieut. A.C. (Assigned to command 115th Photo Section, Mar. 28, 1927) (Transferred to 115th Obser. Sqd. 40th Div. A.S. Oct. 1, 1928)	Mar. 21, 1927	Mar. 24, 1927
Earl H. Robinson, 1st Lieut. (Transferred from Obser. Sqd.- assigned to command 115th Photo Section Aug. 10, 1928) (Promoted Capt., June 18, 1931) (Transferred to 115th Obser. Sqd. June 18, 1931)	July 30, 1928	Aug. 10, 1928
Russell C. A. Larsen, 1st Lieut. (Transferred from 115th Obser. Sqd. June 18, 1931) (Transferred to 115th Obser. Sqd. Sept. 10, 1935)	Jan. 15, 1930	Jan. 31, 1930
Charles P. Roberts, 2nd Lieut., (Transferred from 115th Obser. Sqd. Sept. 10, 1935) (In lieu of 1st Lieut., Sept. 10, 1935) (Promoted 1st Lieut. Apr. 8, 1938)	Oct. 27, 1933	Oct. 27, 1933
Charles P. Roberts, 1st Lieut. A.C. (Assigned to Command Photo Section Apr. 8, 1938)	Apr. 7, 1938	Apr. 8, 1938

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Activities:

The 115th Photo Section, 40th Division Air Service, California National Guard, was organized in Los Angeles, May 3, 1926, and accepted by the State of California, on the same date. The unit was located at Griffith Park, Los Angeles. Second Lieutenant George C. Sherwood, was transferred from the 115th Observation Squadron, 40th Division Air Service, on May 3, 1926, and assigned to the command of the 115th Photo Section.*

An airplane Observer's real success depends upon his ability not only to operate machine guns in time of war but to gain all information that may be requested, to draw free-hand maps of the territory covered, omitting no item of military importance. The maps may include railroads, highways, mountains, towns, rivers, valleys, ditches, crossroads and so forth. It is also necessary to locate trenches, gun implacements and if possible, to determine the size and number of guns being used. He must also locate all reservoirs, concentration points, ammunition dumps and supply depots.**

In addition, the Photo Observer must keep on the alert for enemy ships, drop a few bombs over some appointed enemy city and take pictures of all wreckage immediately afterward with the aerial camera. Intense training as a Photo Observer in time of peace is necessary, and many hours must be spent in the air observing and taking pictures. The Photo Observer must make reports of the traffic upon highways, describing the types and number of vehicles using the roads, the direction in which the loaded trucks were traveling and the probable destination and the kind of material carried. It is required of a Photo Observer to study railroad traffic and he must, among other things, learn the number and location of all large railroad yards, and estimate if possible, the number of cars that could be stored on all available spur tracks. He is required to learn to report the number of loaded and empty cars in a train while in motion and if possible, to determine the nature of the load carried.***

Objects of military importance include all things used by men in his every day life, the destruction of which would cause great suffering. This is especially true of the water supply of a city, means of communication and transportation with the outside world.

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*115th Photo Section, 40th Division Air Service, Organized May 3, 1926.
General and Special Orders 1926, Special Order No. 86, May 17, 1926.

**California Guardsman December 1927, page 11.

***California Guardsman December 1927, page 11.

Activities: (Continued)

With the many things a Photo Observer must think about, it can readily be seen that when on Mission he is not out for a joy ride but has a very important duty to perform.*

Prior to the World War, aerial photography was successful but it was not until later that its great military value and importance was realized. The advancement in methods and the highly efficient aerial camera has made this branch of the Aerial Observation Service of inestimable value.**

The camera lens has many advantages over the human eye, as it shows the actual size and condition of objects more clearly, and the camera cannot lie. An Observer's report containing statements seemingly unbelievable can be readily verified by the camera. Conditions that may seem of ^{no} great military importance or value to the observer might be overlooked if it were not for the aerial camera. A photograph never forgets and further, records much valuable information brought out when and after a print is finished, read and expertly interpreted.***

All aircraft officers must know something about aerial photography and must be able to recognize at least part of the many objects recorded thereon. The value of such knowledge to Commanders of even the smallest units cannot be overestimated.

Thousands of prints were made by the Photo Sections during the World War and distributed by the Intelligence Section; but many of them were disregarded, especially by infantry commanders, because they were unable to understand them. To an officer who has flown and has accustomed himself to viewing objects from the air, aerial photographs mean much more than to one who has not had that experience. A certain amount of flying time for commanders in other branches of the service would be of great assistance and value. The Photo Section has advanced rapidly and has proven to be of such value, that all branches of the service makes use of the information it supplies. In the infantry, photographs show both friendly and enemy front lines, locates machine gun nests and other strongholds of the enemy.****

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*California Guardsman December 1927, page 11.

**California Guardsman August 1928, page 8.

***California Guardsman August 1928, page 8.

****California Guardsman August 1928, page 8.

Activities: (Continued)

Aerial Photography is also used by artillery units in locating enemy batteries and spotting targets. Methodical study may be made of enemy artillery implacements, by the use of aerial photographs. They also assist in determining the position and kind of battery to be used for counter attacks. There are four classes of aerial photography; verticals, obliques, mosaics and stereograms. Verticals are the most common and are made with the lens axis perpendicular to the earth's surface, the resulting picture resembling a map. Obliques are used to show the contour of the ground, and are usually taken at an altitude of from five hundred to two thousand feet and are made with the lens axis depressed approximately thirty degrees below the horizon. A mosaic is made by putting together two or more strips of overlapping vertical photographs. Stereograms are made with a pair of pictures of the same area; so mounted that when viewed in a stereoscope the effect of relief is obtained. The nature of a photographic mission for the purpose of obtaining any of these different types would depend upon the kind of information wanted.*

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The 115th Photo Section participated in the annual training encampment held September 4th to September 18th, 1926. The Photo Section trained with the 115th Observation Squadron, and the activities of the two branches of the Air Service were closely connected. Adjutant General R. E. Mittelstaedt visited the encampment September 13th, and complimented the officers of the Photo Section highly for their splendid work.**

On Saturday morning, September 18th, about nine thirty A. M., Captain Osgood, of the 115th Observation Squadron, received from the editor of the California Guardsman at Oakland, a request for Photographs of the Air Corps Camp at San Luis Obispo as a contribution for the Camp Edition of the Guardsman. By ten fifteen A. M., the pictures had been taken; by eleven A. M., they had been developed and before noon the photos were ready for delivery. They were then handed to Second Lieutenant Sherwood, Commander of the Photo Unit, who immediately took off for Concord Field near Oakland, where he landed before five P. M., the same afternoon. Prints of the photographs were made, copy was checked and by Monday morning all material was in the hands of the printer and engraver, ready for the press. The speed with which the order for these photos was filled demonstrated the efficiency of the 115th Photo Section.***

The annual training encampment for 1929, was held July 21st to August 4th. The Photo Section did their best with their cameras to cover the most interesting happenings in camp, and make pictures of all important events.

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*California Guardsman August 1928, page 8.

**California Guardsman September 1926, page 31.

***California Guardsman September 1926, page 31.

Activities: (Continued)

Every man in the Photo Section during the encampment had the opportunity of taking Pictures from the air with the large Aerial Camera. The enlisted men were congratulated for the wonderful results they obtained in their line of work. The activities of all troops in camp were covered by Missions from the 115th Photo Section and two and one half hours after pictures were taken, finished prints were dropped from an Airplane to the Commanding Officers of the troops on the ground, indicating to him the speed with which information by photographs could be furnished. Many requests were made for pictures of the Camp at San Luis Obispo and the surrounding territory taken during the 1929 encampment.*

In November 1929, Lieutenant Robinson, Commanding Officer of the Photo Section, made a good will tour of the principal cities of the West Coast and much interest was manifested in the flying service. The annual training encampment for 1930, was held as usual, at San Luis Obispo, July 26th to August 9th, with the same routine of training as in previous years.**

On June 16, 1931, First Lieutenant Russel C. A. Larsen, was assigned to the command of the 115th Photo Section, replacing Lieutenant Earl H. Robinson, who was transferred to the Observation Squadron. Lieutenant Larsen had just returned from taking a special course in Photography at Rantoul, Illinois, and brought with him, many new ideas in photography. The 115th Photo Section attended the 1931 annual training camp at San Luis Obispo, July 19th to August 2nd. The unit went into Camp with the 115th Observation Squadron as usual.***

During the annual encampment at San Luis Obispo, July 10th to July 24th, 1932, 115th Photo Section participated in the air maneuvers, and each Officer and Observer of the unit completed photographic Missions, taking pictures of points of interest in the vicinity of the Camp at altitudes ranging from one thousand to one thousand five hundred feet.****

The 115th Photo Section has, during the twelve years of its existence, ^{has} been closely connected with the 115th Observation Squadron and has rendered valuable service to the entire California National Guard. The Photo Section being well equipped and eminently qualified to gather any data available, has become a practically indispensable branch of the California National Guard.

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*California Guardsman August 1929, page 22.

**California Guardsman November 1929, page 18.

***California Guardsman August 1931, page 4.

****California Guardsman August 1932, page 12.