

enemy two-seaters without results. (The Germans defended themselves furiously).<sup>3</sup>

6-7-8 Sept Guynemer carried out air fights without results. He was very tired, nervous and ill-tempered. (Translator's Note: I personally noticed that our Great Georges was becoming more and more withdrawn and showing symptoms of irritability that was not like him at all—ESM).

11 September Capitaine Georges Guynemer flew on patrol with Lieutenant Bozon Verduraz. Guynemer did not return from patrol—he never did return! His brilliant career lasted two years: from 18 July 1915 to 11 September 1917.

(Translator's Note: His glory is reflected in those two dates; he was mentioned 25 times in citations, scored 54 air victories, received all the war decorations of France and the Allies. Also, Escadrille Spa 3 was, at that time, at the top of its glory. During those two years, in aerial combats they had scored 128 confirmed air victories and 132 unconfirmed air victories. On 19 September Major Brocard was appointed Chief of the Cabinet of Minister Monsieur Dumesnil. Brocard's parting with the Escadrille was very touching.

This very brave commander [a pilot since March 1912] was shot down seven times during the war, was mentioned in six citations, and was awarded the Legion d'honneur and the Croix de Guerre with four palms.

He died in Paris on 29 May 1950 at the age of 65 years—ESM).

### The Escadrille in the Structure of Groupe de Combat 12: 1917

- 21 June Capitaine Lamonde was reported missing in action.
- 22 June Lieutenant Pandevan was wounded.
- 12 August Sergent Massot was wounded.
- 14 August Heroic death of the American pilot Oliver M. Chadwick, Spa 73.
- 16 August Seinery was wounded.
- 18 August American pilot Caporal Charles J. Biddle, Esc 73, reported missing. (Ed. Note: Biddle survived and returned, of course.)
- 19 August Sergent Hucks was wounded.
- August The accident with Lemel. The fatal accident with Tasso (British soldier who was accidentally beheaded by a propeller). Dunkerque was bombed during the night.

General Antonin Brocard  
(Translated by Edgar S. Meos)



### About the Translator

Edgar Meos, pictured postwar in full dress Estonian uniform, served in the Russian Air Service. He wears a captured Mauser pistol taken from a German battery commander killed in action. Meos was assigned to "Les Cigognes" during the war and was well acquainted with the various pilots including Guynemer, Brocard, Deullin, Heurtaux and others. This article was translated by him for use in the *Cross & Cockade Journal* some time ago. Although this article has some errors it has been submitted as an historic account for use as a primary research source. Sadly Meos is no longer with us, but his comments add flavor to Brocard's original entries. For more of Meos' French career, see the *Cross & Cockade Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Autumn 1966, "A Russian Stork," pp. 260-65.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Although not listed here, Alfred Heurtaux was credited with shooting down the noted German ace, Leutnant Kurt Wintgens, Jasta 1, on 25 September 1916. (Reference: *Cross & Cockade Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Autumn 1962, p. 218).

<sup>2</sup> Auger was the victim of his own obstinacy and daring. The adornment of his glory was his modesty and courage—EM.

<sup>3</sup> Once he attacked six, then eight enemy two-seaters; he returned with the fuselage torn to pieces and his machine gun wrecked—EM

## ERNEST BENWAY A.K.A. LEO BENOIT OF THE LAFAYETTE FLYING CORPS

by Dennis Gordon

In August 1914 when war broke out between France and Germany, young American citizens who were residing in France rushed to the aid of the Republic. The first volunteers quickly joined the French Foreign Legion. Soon after, other Americans living in France and in the United States heeded the call for drivers for the American volunteer motor-ambulance organizations. As early as 31 August 1914, still others joined France's Service Aeronautique, the vanguard of volunteer aviators in an organization to be founded later, the Lafayette Flying Corps.

The most famous of these volunteers whose numbers eventually totaled 269 men were the 38 American pilots of the Lafayette Escadrille. As the French and American press publicized the pilots' exploits, it created a large body of young American volunteers who wished to join the squadron. However, their numbers far exceeded the squadron's need for replacements that occasionally appeared on its 12-19-man roster. So in mid-June 1916 the three-man Franco-American committee, which had formed the Lafayette Escadrille, decided to form the Franco-American Flying Corps (later renamed the Lafayette Flying Corps) in hopes of utilizing the new volunteers by placing them in other French squadrons.

By this time, dozens of Americans had been serving at the Front both with the Lafayette Escadrille and with other French bombardment and chasse escadrilles. Their previous service also qualified those men to become members of the Lafayette Flying Corps.

The three-man Franco-American committee was expanded to 24 individuals both in France and in the U.S. who were to handle the finances and business of the Corps. The expanded committee appointed Dr. Gros, Director for France, and Examining Physician.

American millionaire William K. Vanderbilt posted sizeable funds at the disposal of the Corps at the Morgan/Drexel bank of Bonbright and Co. Corps headquarters were established at 15 Avenue des Champs Elysee. There, the committee's first task was to compose a recruiting pamphlet listing the requirements for enlistment in French aviation, for distribution in the United States through its American representatives.

Money from the Vanderbilt contribution (500,000 francs) was also used to help volunteers to pay their passage from the United States, as not all candidates were residing in France. The committee's U.S. representatives would screen and process recruits in New York City before sending them on to France.

Once the candidates had been enrolled in France's Service Aeronautique, they were paid a monthly allowance of 100 francs (later increased to 200 francs). Upon completion of their flight training,



"Eleve-pilote" Leo Benoit (Ernest L. Benway) at the "Ecole Militaire D'Aviation" near Avord, August 1917. (All photos are from Doughboy Historical Society.)

179 Lafayette Flying Corpsmen served at the Front, assigned singly, and in twos and threes to a total of 92 French squadrons, spread from the Channel coast to the Swiss frontier. Later on 128 men would transfer to the U.S. aviation forces, becoming the group and squadron commanders, patrol leaders, and pilots in America's fledgling air service. Sixty-seven of their number would sacrifice their lives for France.

One such Lafayette Flying Corpsman who volunteered in the United States was an eighteen-year-old youth from New England. Ernest Leon Benway was born in Foxboro, Massachusetts, on 1 August 1898 the son of Louis A. Benway, a jeweler, and Delia (Roy) Benway. He attended grammar school and St. Joseph's school in Attleboro, Massachusetts, but dropped out of high school to work at a linen mill.

In the spring of 1917 Benway decided to enter the European war

as an ambulance driver. However, his parents would not give their approval, so he applied for a passport under the name Leo Ernest Benoit, the French spelling of his surname. Benway filled out an application with the American Ambulance Service, listing his occupation as mechanic. He was accepted for service in France, and on 5 May 1917 he sailed for Bordeaux aboard the SS *Espagne*.

On 16 May Benway arrived in Paris at the American Ambulance Headquarters at 21 Rue Raynouard. But after talking with Dr. Gros, the examining physician and Paris director of the Lafayette Flying Corps, Benway decided to enter French aviation instead of the Ambulance Service.

In order to protect his U.S. citizenship, on 4 June Benway enlisted in the French Foreign Legion at their Paris headquarters at the Hotel de Invalides. This was required by American candidates about to enter French aviation. By pledging their allegiance to the Legion rather than to France, they could protect and retain their U.S. citizenship. This was a right awarded to France by the Hague Conference of 1907.

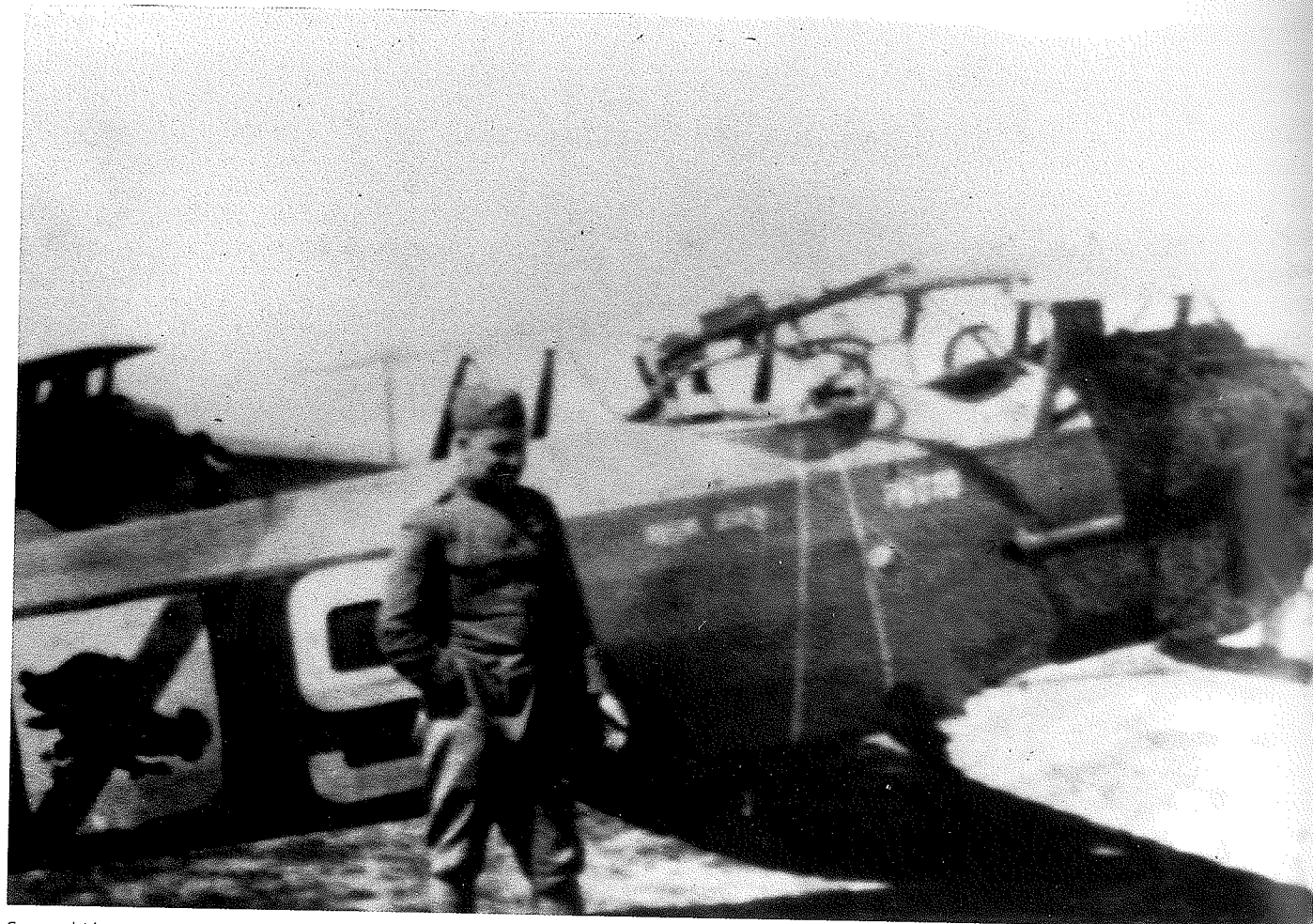
On 10 June 1917, Benway joined France's Service Aeronautique under the name of Leo Benoit. From 22 June to 15 November 1917 he attended the aviation schools at Avord, Juvisy, and the G.D.E. He received his brevet (#8941) on the Caudron on 22

September 1917.

On 18 November 1917, Benway was assigned to Escadrille Spa 84 and flew at the Front with that squadron until 13 December. On that date, while on patrol, he became lost and was shot down in aerial combat near Laon when he was jumped by seven German scouts.

Benway's plane crashed just inside allied lines and burst into flame. French troops pulled the unconscious pilot from the wreckage, and he was transported to the hospital at Villers Cotterets where he remained comatose for 37 hours. Doctors treated Benway for a broken nose, a broken left leg, and a broken left arm. He also suffered a dislocated hip.

Following a period of recuperation, Benway was returned to the G.D.E. and trained on the SPAD bi-place. On 31 January 1918 he was sent back to the Front to Spa 228, an observation squadron, and remained with that unit until 25 August 1918. On 29 March Sergeant Benway was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Aviation Section Signal Corps. On 6 April 1918, Benway was awarded France's Croix de Guerre with Star for continuing on a photographic patrol over enemy lines after having been wounded. His citation is as follows:



Second Lieutenant Leo Benoit (E.L. Benway) on detached service at the Front with Spa 228 standing beside his SPAD XI two-seater reconnaissance plane, April 1918. Squadron insignia is visible on side of aircraft.



Lieutenant Leo Benoit (E.L. Benway), 213th Pursuit Squadron, USAS, December 1918.

"A volunteer in the service of France, a skilful pilot, of extraordinary sang-froid, he constantly carried out in a most satisfactory manner, the numerous missions entrusted to him.

"The 6th of April 1918, while on a patrol far behind the enemy lines, Sergeant Benoit was wounded by an explosive bullet but continued his mission in spite of his painful wound and returned with photographs of great importance."

Benway had to fight his way home from this mission. His SPAD bi-place again came under heavy attack by swarming enemy fighters. His French observer was killed, yet Benway managed to shoot one enemy chase down despite a painful arm wound. Weakened from loss of blood, he crash-landed within allied lines, severely wrenching his shoulder.

While recovering from these injuries, the now-Lieutenant Benway, USAS, served as a ferry pilot at the 5th Air Depot before being assigned on 25 August to the 213th Pursuit Squadron, USAS, where he served until the 11 November 1918 Armistice. Along with his other war decorations, he was also awarded the French fourragere for having served with a unit that had won two citations in French Army Orders.

When Lieutenant Benway returned to the United States in early 1919, he was assigned to the Air Service Flying School, North Island, San Diego, California. In May he was transferred to the 2nd Aero Squadron, and on 27 June he married Sarah Frances Bell of Los Angeles. They eventually had four children: William Stuart, Betty Louise, Doris Jean, and David Frederick.

On 30 October 1919 Lieutenant Benway was ordered with the 2nd Aero Squadron to Fort Mills, Corregidor Island, in Manila Bay, the Philippines. Their orders were to aerially map Luzon and the other islands of the Philippine archipelago. On 29 November 1919 the squadron's pilots and aircraft sailed for the Philippines aboard the SS *Great Northern*. Also aboard ship was a load of Christmas mail for the U.S. troops stationed in Vladivostok, Siberia. Accompanying Benway on this circuitous route to the Philippines was his new bride, Frances. With a sense of adventure, they viewed the forthcoming cruise as a belated honeymoon.

While en route to Siberia, on 10 December the *Great Northern* struck an iceberg 420 miles from Vladivostok. The ship's captain sent the following message to the nearest vessel, the USS *New Orleans*.

"Experiencing very bad weather, strong northerly gale, mountain high breaking sea, terrific squalls. Working to get under lea of Siberia coast. Reinforced necessary bulkheads where possible. Pump doing utmost. Would appreciate services of one of your divers on arrival. Also if possible would appreciate 150 tons fresh water to enable us to proceed to Nagasaki on completing necessary repairs at Vladivostok. Lost large amount fresh water. Cannot condense enough."

On 24 December 1919 the *Great Northern* limped into Manila Bay carrying the Benways and the 2nd Aero Squadron. Once there, the Benways settled into the Army post at Corregidor. Then Lieutenant Benway began the aerial mapping of the islands in one of the Army's first pontoon-equipped aircraft in anticipation of the construction of military airfields, including Clark Field which would eventually house Clark Air Force Base.

Upon completion of the project, Benway decided to leave military service and enter commercial aviation. On 20 May 1920 Benway was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army at Fort Mills, the Philippine Islands. On 15 July the Benways sailed for San Francisco aboard the U.S. Army transport *Sheridan*.

When Lieutenant Benway was released from the officer's reserve corps in 1921, he relocated to Los Angeles where, for the next two years, he engaged in commercial aviation and flying instruction. He also served as a stunt pilot for the Hollywood studios.

Benway then moved to Detroit, Michigan and worked for three years for the Detroit Aircraft Corporation whose owner was millionaire banker and broker, August Belmont.

In 1926 he re-entered the California aviation field as a civilian pilot and flew Stinsons, Ryans, and Lockheeds on private contract. He also continued as Belmont's private pilot in his California



E.L. Benway (l) in Peru beside a Lockheed Vega while under contract with Pan American-Grace Airways, spring of 1930.



E.L. Benway while under contract with the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, 1934.



E.L. Benway in Grass Valley, Nevada, while working for Samuel Goldwyn Studios, 1935.

operation. While in this capacity, he set a commercial aviation record when he flew the wealthy sportsman in his new Lockheed Vega monoplane from Roosevelt Field, Long Island, to the Boston airport in one hour, 12 minutes. The Wasp-powered Vega was the same plane that Charles and Anne Lindberg had just flown on their Pan-American exploration to chart new air lanes between North and South America. Previously, Benway had served as aerial chauffeur for the Lindbergs on their honeymoon. Benway also flew millionaire notables and Hollywood celebrities in the Vega around the continent while in the employ of Belmont. In 1927 he flew the Hoover relief committee over Louisiana observing the levees and taking the President on other observation flights.

In 1928 pilot Benway made national headlines while piloting the "Tampan," a Stinson-Detroit aircraft, from Tampa to Detroit for A.S. Kirkeby, Chicago and Tampa capitalist. Benway and Foye Shumaker, his assistant pilot, were forced down on a Michigan farm due to engine failure. The plane's nose sunk into the ground upon impact, bending its propeller and damaging one wing. Benway suffered cuts and bruises about his face, while Shumaker was uninjured. Benway remained grounded for a week awaiting new parts then continued on to Grand Rapids. On 4 December 1929 Benway set a new speed record in a Wasp-powered Vega dur-

ing a flight from New York to Boston.

In the spring of 1930 "Benny" Benway signed a six-month contract with Pan America-Grace Airways in South America to fly the mail and occasionally carry passengers. Benway piloted Sikorskys, Lockheeds, and Fairchilds along challenging air routes from Lima, Peru, to Argentina, Chile, and Ecuador. His aircraft of choice remained the Lockheed Vega which was touted as "the fastest commercial plane now in existence."

That same fall Benway returned to San Diego to become a transport pilot for E.L. Cord's Century Pacific Airlines. He left Cord to rejoin the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation at Burbank as a sales representative. In 1934 he was placed in charge of Lockheed's "aerobot" and ejection-seat projects.

For the next several years Benway worked as a pilot for the Idaho-Maryland Mines Corporation, a Nevada based mining company. Following his tenure there, he was contacted by the Samuel Goldwyn Studios to write a screenplay based on his aviation experiences. The project never reached fruition. So in February 1939 Benway again journeyed to Central America to head up Aero Columbia's fledgling air fleet.

While flying in Central and South America, Benway witnessed

rebel uprisings in Bolivia, Peru, and Argentina. In Lima his taxi came under fire when he was caught in a crossfire between Federal and rebel troops. In May 1939 he returned to the United States to escape the primitive flying conditions, the treacherous weather, and the armed hostilities beneath America's southern border. A pilot of vast experience, by now Benway had flown nearly every type of aircraft in service on the American continent while amassing a total commercial flying time of more than 10,000 hours.

When Benway returned to the States he became a passenger pilot for American Airlines. In September 1940 he was recognized by that firm when he was given the honorary title of Admiral of the Flagship Fleet "in recognition of consistent and meritorious service which has contributed materially to the increased public use of air transportation."

Shortly after Benway received this award, he was contacted by Clayton Knight, the noted New York aviation illustrator, who had formed a committee to facilitate the enlistment of American volunteers into the Royal Canadian Air Force. Knight, a former Air Service veteran with 206 Squadron, RAF, convinced Benway to become a recruiter and Pacific Coast technical head of his Clayton Knight Committee, an RAF alumni association which was enroll-



E.L. Benway in Central America with a nine-foot live boa constrictor draped around his neck.

ing qualified American pilots in the Royal Canadian Air Force. Based in the Hollywood-Roosevelt hotel, Benway became the western regional director for the Canadian Aviation Bureau which was engaged in the induction of pilots into the RAF Eagle Squadron, the English Civil Ferry Service, the Transatlantic and Transpacific and Royal Canadian Air Force. He subsequently was made an honorary Captain in the RCAF.

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Benway helped to transfer the Eagle Squadron volunteers back into the US Army and Naval Air Forces. When this effort was completed, Benway left the RCAF to take a commission as a Lieutenant in the U.S. Naval Reserve. Following refresher training at the U.S. Naval Air Station at Corpus Christi, Texas, he was placed in charge of the PBV base at the San Diego U.S. Naval Air Station. His duty assignment was submarine patrol along the West Coast of the United States.

In the fall of 1943 painful kidney stones forced Lieutenant-Commander Benway to take medical retirement from the military. In December of that same year he began flying Catalina PBVs under contract for the Rubber Development Corporation in Brazil. In the spring of 1944 he returned to the United States and flew as a private contractor with the military. It was shortly after he made his last flight for the U.S. Government in 1945 that Benway



E.L. Benway, regional director for the Canadian Aviation Bureau, at his headquarters at the Hollywood-Roosevelt Hotel, recruiting for the RAF Eagle Squadron, summer of 1940.



Lieutenant E.L. Benway, USN, at the U.S. Naval Air Station, San Diego, California, 1942.

learned that his son, William, an Army Air Corps lieutenant who was stationed on Corregidor when it had fallen, had been beaten to death by Japanese troops in 1942 while on the Bataan death march.

Following the war, Benway worked briefly at the Hollywood studios as a flyer, flying consultant, and as an aviation technical writer. Bothered by lingering health problems, he decided to conclude his aviation career which had spanned three decades. During that historic period, he had logged many military hours and more than 11,000 commercial hours.

In retirement, Ernest and Frances Benway opened the Beachcomber Shop in Newport, California. In December 1952 the Benway family located to Oahu, Hawaii. Frances Benway became a sales representative for mainland clothing lines and also represented Hawaiian clothing lines to the mainland. Ernest set up an import-export business dealing in Samoan goods brought to Hawaii by the U.S. Coast Guard, and others, which helped to bolster the flagging Samoan post-war economy. The import-export business grew into a jewelry factory called Polynesian Imports that utilized oriental and Polynesian designs.

For more than a decade Ernest Benway's health had been deteriorating. In the mid-1950s he suffered a warning heart attack. Then on 28 May 1956 while out sailing his boat with a friend on Kaneohe Bay, "Benny" Benway suffered a fatal heart attack. He was 57 years of age at the time of his death. It is fitting that he was buried

at Hawaii's National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, after having courageously served his country in two world wars. In 1963 his faithful wife, Frances, was buried beside him.

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Author conversation with Eddie Guy 4 December 1997

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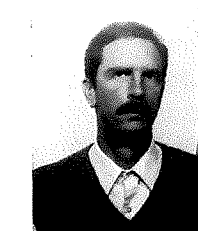
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Various Benway documents via Doris and David Benway

E.L. Benway pilot log book.

#### About the Author



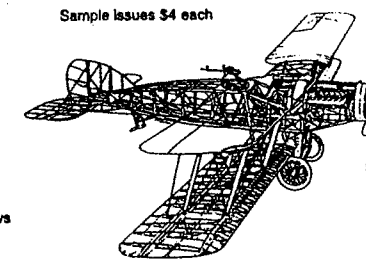
Dennis Gordon lives in Missoula, Montana, and is an author and military historian. He received his MFA from the University of Montana. He has recently finished a volume of detailed biographies of the 269 men of the Lafayette Flying Corps which is currently being published. It will be available this Spring. An earlier volume of his, *Lafayette*

*Escadrille Pilot Biographies*, has become a standard work on the subject. Dennis is married to Pauline, and they have five children.

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