

SKIES ABOVE GREAT LAKES

Did you know that naval aviation is one of the premier communities within the U.S. Navy and has been in existence for over 100 years? Read through this brief history to discover how naval aviation got its start, and when (and why) naval aviation touched down in the Great Lakes.

The Navy's first interest in planes can be traced back to as early as 1898. It was around that time that naval officers began to investigate the military possibilities of airplanes; how can these help us be a better Navy? However, it wasn't until 1911 when the first aircraft, a Curtiss A-1 Triad, was purchased and the first naval officer reported for duty in Pensacola, Florida.

In 1917, Commanding Officer (CO) William Moffett, established a flight school and numerous A Schools (where sailors receive their specialized training after boot camp) to support naval aviation at Great Lakes Naval Training Station. William Wrigley Jr., founder and owner of the Chicago Cubs, even bought planes for sailors to train with. Talk about having friends in high places!

After World War I, the flight school at Great Lakes closed and the majority of aviation training moved to Pensacola. Only twenty years later the outbreak of World War II heightened the importance of naval aviation. Due to the rapid increase of young recruits, Naval Air Station Glenview in Glenview, Illinois became home to aviation training for aviation cadets. Throughout the 1940s, nearly 9,000 aviation cadets trained at Glenview, had over 800,000 flight hours and over 2 million take offs and landings. It wasn't uncommon for cadets to receive 100 hours of instruction before they could complete their training. To accommodate all the new recruits, Naval Air Station Glenview had to expand their base. 1.3 million square yards of concrete were poured to construct runways - or the equivalent of over 200 football fields!

At the end of World War II, naval aviation largely abandoned the Great Lakes area. Naval Air Station Glenview returned to its previous use as a Reserve Station until the 1990s. Today, there is no aviation training located at Great Lakes with all aviation training occurring at Naval Air Station Pensacola. Naval aviation's time in the Great Lakes may have been short, but it had an important effect.

BLUE ANGEL PLANES



The Blue Angels were created after World War II, under the support of Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, to continue to encourage interest in naval aviation. As the years continued, naval aviation maneuvers and technology continued to expand, making the Blue Angels a real event for audiences to witness.

The U.S. Navy Blue Angels note that with "precision combat maneuvers" and the incorporation of aerobatics, audiences flocked to experience the excitement.

June 2021 marks the 75th anniversary of that first flight!



Sawyer the Seadog poses for a photograph with the F/A-18 fighter planes in Portland, Maine in 2017. Image courtesy of Naval History and Heritage Command.

This worksheet has been provided by the National Museum of the American Sailor

2531 Sheridan Road, Building 42
Great Lakes, Illinois 60088

nmas.fct@navy.mil / (847) 688-3154



SAILOR SPOTLIGHT

FILL IN THE BLANK



Ever wonder about some of the U.S. Navy's earliest aviators? Read through the Sailor Spotlight below to learn about one of the earliest naval aviation pioneers!

Eugene Ely, an Iowa native, worked as an automotive salesman before being hired as Glenn Curtiss' (an aviation pioneer) right hand for naval aviation. Ely would later go on to be the first to successfully take off from the deck of a ship; the USS *Birmingham* in Hampton Roads, Virginia on November 14, 1910. It was reported that the plane plunged downward as soon as it cleared the runway and the aircraft's wheels dipped into the water before rising. Supposedly, Ely's goggles were covered with spray and he promptly landed on a beach rather than circling the harbor as planned.

Only two months later Ely had the distinction of being the first to successfully land on a ship; the USS *Pennsylvania* in San Francisco Bay. Sadly, Ely died in a plane crash on October 19, 1911 in Georgia, just shy of his 25th birthday. However, it is because of Ely's influence and accomplishments that naval aviation could evolve to the premier community it is today.

Put your new naval aviation knowledge to the test by completing the Fill in the Blank section below!

1. The Navy's first interest in planes can be traced back to as early as _____.
2. It wasn't until _____ when the first aircraft, a _____, was purchased and the first naval officer reported for duty in _____.
3. Due to the rapid increase of young recruits, during World War I, _____ in Glenview, Illinois became home to aviation training for aviation cadets in our area.
4. _____, founder and owner of the Chicago Cubs, even bought planes for sailors to train with during World War II.
5. Eugene Ely was the first naval aviator to successfully take off from the deck of a ship; the USS _____ in Hampton Roads, Virginia on November 14, 1910.
6. The U.S. Navy's Blue Angels will be celebrating _____ years of flight this year!

ANSWER KEY



1. 1898
2. 1911, Curtiss A-1 Triad, Pensacola, Florida
3. Naval Air Station Glenview
4. William Wright Jr.
5. Birmingham
6. 75

CREATE YOUR OWN NAVY PLANE

Color in the following planes and share your pictures with NMAS on social media!



National Museum of the American Sailor



@ntlmuseumamericansailor



