

Col. James Prentice

by Lynne Belluscio

I had good intentions of writing about the Prentice Roller Mill but when I pulled the Prentice family file I discovered a great story about Colonel James Prentice who was born in LeRoy, July 5, 1874.

He was the son of John and Sarah Randall Prentice. The family moved to Batavia and he graduated from Batavia High School in 1893. He was accepted into West Point and graduated in 1901. Upon graduation he was stationed in the Philippines in an artillery unit and was in charge of laying out mines in Manila Bay.

When World War I broke out, he returned to the United States and was stationed at Fort Omaha, Nebraska. This is where the story gets interesting. He had spent time observing airplane flights of the Wright brothers and Glenn Curtis and learned to fly. He became involved with aerial balloons for the Army and became the first commander of the aviation school at Camp John Wise in San Antonio, Texas.

The camp was named for a pioneer in ballooning who was last seen in a balloon over Lake Michigan on September 29, 1879 on an aerial trip from St. Louis. At one time Col. Prentice was in charge of 10,000 aerial students. He was seriously injured in a fall



Veterans of the balloon. Left to right: Mr. Frank P. Lahm, Major J. C. McCoy, Balloon Pilot No. 1; Colonel A.L. Fulton, Major Harry R. Vaughn, Colonel James Prentice, Major E. Lazaire, Colonel H.B. Hersey.

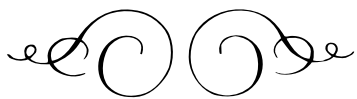
from a balloon and had to have a kidney and several ribs removed. Because of his injuries he was assigned to Washington, D.C. in charge of balloon and airship engineering and equipment design.

Between 1920-1926 he was in charge of Sound Ranging developments and it was noted that he was a pioneer in the use of telephones for artillery, the use of subaqueous listeners for submarines and aerial listeners

for airplanes and the use of sound ranging devices to locate artillery. He designed balloon and airship shapes to improve speed and control and was a member of the U.S. Military Engineering Society and the Aero Club.

He was a prolific writer concerning technical improvements for the military. His career took him literally around the world, but his injuries suffered from the balloon incident finally forced him to retire in

1926. He never married and after retirement he spent his winters in Miami where he devoted his time to the study of bamboo. He proposed that bamboo could save the vast forests of the United States by providing building material. He spent summers in Batavia in the family homestead on East Main Street. He died at Walter Reed Hospital in 1934. He requested that he be buried in Batavia in Elmwood Cemetery.



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