



The  
**Oakwood**  
Historical Society

— *Make History With Us* —

# Historian

*Preserving the past, present, and future of the Oakwood Community • Fall 2017*



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## Lieutenant Macready's Leap into "Utter Darkness"

—David Schmidt

**M**cCook Field was an early U. S. Army airfield and experimental station standing near downtown Dayton, just north of the confluence of the Mad and Miami Rivers. Named for the family of "Fighting McCooks," who were important figures in the Union Army during the Civil War, McCook Field was a hotbed of aviation experimentation and research from its opening in 1917 to its closure in 1927, when its operations were relocated to Wright Field. Many of the aircraft in service at McCook field were De Havilland 4 (DH-4) airplanes, which were manufactured locally by the Dayton-Wright Airplane Company.

Several achievements in research and development occurred at McCook Field, including developments in aircraft pressurization and improvements in airport service vehicles. Important developments also included improvements in the free-fall parachute by the Equipment Section of the Engineering Division at McCook Field, which resumed work that had begun during World War I on parachutes for use with airplanes. First Lieutenant Harold R. Harris became the first member of the Air Service to have his life saved by parachute, when a plane he was testing at McCook Field malfunctioned on October 20, 1922.

Many improvements were also made at McCook Field in night flying. In the post-WWI era, night flying was fraught with risks, especially in navigation and landing. A pilot flying at night often placed wingtip flares on the plane. Although these flares could be useful for emergency landings, flares were unreliable and sometimes hazardous since they could ignite dry foliage on the field or set fire to the plane if it crashed.

Many of the improvements in night flying resulted from efforts by Lieutenant Donald I. Bruner, who developed proper lighting equipment for airplanes and landing fields. The Air Service began testing Lt. Bruner's developments with round-trip flights to Norton Field in Columbus. Lt. Bruner's efforts resulted in the installation of flashing beacons at McCook Field, London, Ohio, and Norton Field to guide pilots along the route. Lt. Bruner also developed the airways flare, which was mounted inside the fuselage and dropped when the pilot pulled a release handle. The flare ignited when a small parachute opened. The flare burned for three-and-one-half minutes and descended about 800 feet while aflame.

Among the many notable aviators serving at McCook Field was Lieutenant John A. Macready (Figure 1), who was assigned to McCook Field in 1918.

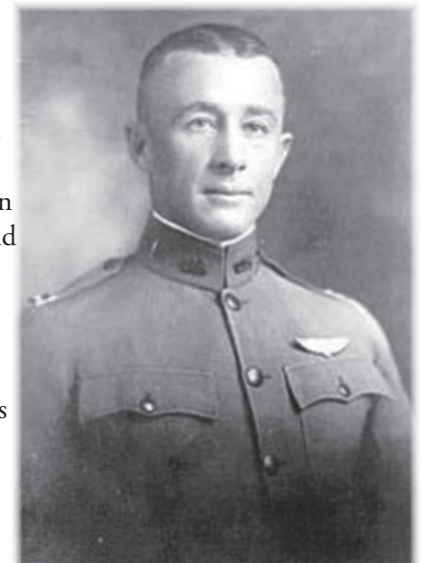


Figure 1

*Cont on page 3*

**THE OAKWOOD  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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- 2017 -

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## Message from the President

It is always a delight to see *The Oakwood Historical Society* participating in the life of the community. The past few months have been busy for us as we have been involved in documenting the architecture of the buildings in Oakwood. Over 30 volunteers have been out taking photos of homes and businesses. In fact, I just happened to look out my window and see one of those volunteers taking a photo of my own house!

There are children in our garden on a regular basis, keeping *The Homestead* lively. We have had a presence at the *Oakwood Farmers' Market* on alternate weekends. There have been a number of planning meetings going on among board members and volunteers as they prepare for a busy fall.

Please keep in mind all our wonderful upcoming events, many of which are listed here in this newsletter: *The Far Hills Speaker Series*, *Woodland Days*, the annual *Fall Photoshoot Fundraiser*, our newest event - an Adult Halloween party, and our annual meeting with a special guest speaker.

It is always heartening to have YOU contact us for your event or your inquiry into Oakwood's history. Our phone rings regularly, and we get messages from our website, asking all sorts of questions about the heritage and resources of Oakwood. We try to get back to you in a timely manner and are very fortunate to have a couple of good researchers who help us out when they can. It is our pleasure to return the results of our research to the community.

In closing, enjoy the wonderful fall weather and plan to attend some (or all!) of our upcoming events. We so appreciate our membership and those who donate to our organization – you all help Make History With Us!

Connect with history, and *Make History With Us!*

Carol Holm  
*President*

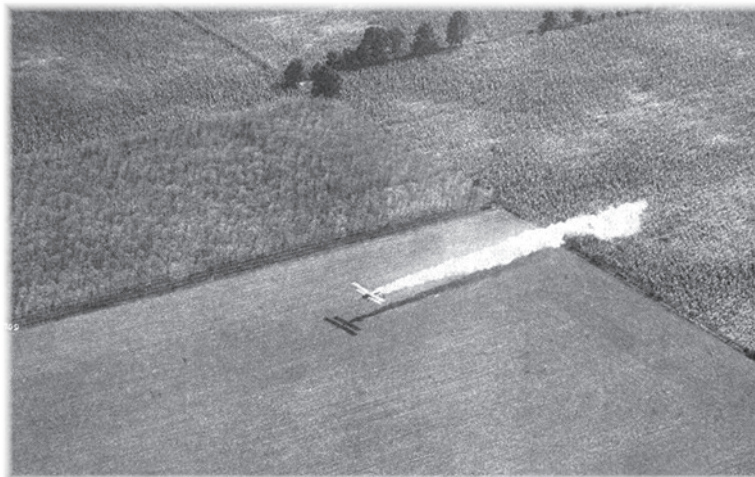
Please be sure to check the back page of this edition of the *Historian* to check your membership status!

## Lieutenant Macready's Leap into "Utter Darkness" *(cont)*

On August 3, 1921, Lt. Macready performed the first experimental aerial application system for spraying pesticides from an airplane, thus flying the world's first "crop duster" (Figure 2). That same year, he set an altitude record by flying to a height of 34,509 feet. In 1922, Lt. Macready set an aircraft endurance record with Lt. Oakley George Kelly, by flying 35 hours, 18 minutes, and 30 seconds. The following year, the same aviators made the first non-stop coast-to-coast flight from Long Island, New York to San Diego, California with a total flight time of 26 hours, 50 minutes, and 48 seconds.

On the evening of June 18, 1924, Lt. Macready was returning to McCook Field in a DH-4 from a routine, round-trip test flight to Norton Field. A few minutes after 10:00 pm, and approaching Dayton from the southeast at 5000 feet, Lt. Macready enjoyed the night view of the lights of Dayton in almost complete silence, save for the muffled sounds of the airplane's engine.

Then the engine sputtered and died.



*Figure 2*

In 1924, the area directly south of Dayton included Oakwood, which was undergoing rapid development, and Van Buren Township (modern-day Kettering), which was still relatively undeveloped. Notable sites in Van Buren Township included Hills and Dales Park, the Dayton Community Country Club, and the recently-developed Southern Hills neighborhood. Recent developments in Van Buren Township also included a few scattered, upscale homes standing to the south of Dorothy Lane in the area of Blossom Heath Road.

Corydon ("C.E.") Ainsworth, who was President of Uplands Realty, had recently moved from Oakwood to a newly-build home on Blossom Heath Road that overlooked a deep creek valley. On the evening of June 18, 1924, Mr. Ainsworth hosted a dinner party for several friends that included Edward Wuichet, who was recent past-President of the Dayton Chamber of Commerce. Having enjoyed wine and dinner, Mr. Ainsworth and his guests adjourned to the home's outside terrace. Their conversation turned to the Bible; specifically, the Book of Revelation and the end of the world, when a bright light descended from the night sky and then flickered out. Moments later, the sight of a fiery explosion, the sound of a terrible crash, and a melancholy call for help from the darkness above them froze them in fear.<sup>1</sup>

Upon discovering that his airplane's engine had quit, Lt. Macready surmised the plane was out of gas. He switched fuel sources to the airplane's auxiliary tank. Nothing happened. With the nose of the plane pointed toward the revolving beacon at McCook Field, Lt. Macready momentarily entertained the idea of being able to reach the air strip in a glide. Then he realized the glide would fall considerably short of the field.

Flying over the city of Dayton, Lt. Macready observed the buildings and automobile headlights below him. He realized it was essential to bring the airplane down in a less populated area to minimize the risk of injuring anyone on the ground. Fortunately, Lt. Macready's experience as an aviator in the Dayton area had left him well familiar with the geography of the region. Observing the surrounding area below him, Lt. Macready pointed the nose of his airplane southwestward and in the direction of the largest and closest unlit expanse he could find – the Dayton Community Country Club.

## Lieutenant Macready's Leap into "Utter Darkness" *(cont)*

Because he had been flying at the relatively high altitude of 5000 feet, Lt. Macready decided he had enough room to put the plane into a dive in hopes of starting the engine by rotating the propeller. This was to no avail. Pulling back on the control stick, Lt. Macready put the plane back into a shallow glide at an airspeed of approximately 70 mph. He dropped the first of his two flares in an effort to illuminate the area over which he was gliding. Nothing happened. Pulling back on the handle of the second flare, Lt. Macready waited. No light appeared beneath the plane.<sup>2</sup>

Lt. Macready looked below and ahead into the darkness but he couldn't distinguish anything on the ground. He knew that portions of the area south of the city, particularly Hills and Dales Park, were rough, hilly, and covered with trees. Dismissing the idea of making a blind landing, Lt. Macready decided to jump from his plane when he reached an altitude of 1,000 feet. He unbuckled his safety belt and crawled out onto the wing of the plane while keeping one hand on the plane's control stick in an attempt to keep the nose of the plane up. Lt. Macready later recounted: "Slipping through space on a helpless ship, in utter darkness, over strange territory, I had to work fast. I let go of the plane and let the wind blow me free of the ship."<sup>3</sup>

Tumbling through the darkness, and concerned that his parachute might get caught on the plane, Lt. Macready counted two seconds and then pulled the parachute's release ring. Nothing happened. He then yanked at the ring again and the parachute opened with a jolt to his shoulders that snapped him upright. As he drifted slowly downward, Lt. Macready saw in the distance his plane crash and explode into a ball of flame. Then all was silent.

Considering the possibility that he could be hurt upon landing, Lt. Macready "decided to yell, just for luck, and see what could be done.

'Hello below! Hey down there!'

'Where are you?'

'Up here in a parachute,'"<sup>4</sup> Lt. Macready answered, as he crashed into the tops of the trees below him. He grabbed at branches as he fell, before the parachute became entangled in the trees and stopped his fall. The force of stopping swung him against the wall of an embankment at the top of a 100-foot creek valley.

As Lt. Macready dangled above the creek valley, Edward Wuichet, and another guest from C.E. Ainsworth's dinner party who Lt. Macready later identified as "a man named Mitcham,"<sup>5</sup> came crashing through the brush at the top of the creek embankment. After determining that the aviator was unhurt, the two men pulled him up from below by the ropes of the parachute. Returning with his rescuers to Mr. Ainsworth's house, Lt. Macready telephoned the guard at McCook Field to report what had happened.

Concerned about the danger presented by his crashed airplane, Lt. Macready set off with Mr. Wuichet in an automobile to find the wreckage. After spotting a glow of light reflected from the sky, the two men drove in the general direction of the light and located the remains of the crashed airplane, which was still burning intensely. The plane had crashed "near a ravine in a rolling wheat field and about 100 feet from the Lebanon Pike, a well traveled highway."<sup>6</sup>

By the time the two men arrived at the crash site, a large crowd had gathered around the blazing wreckage. The onlookers were horrified at the thought they were witnessing the cremation of the airplane's pilot, until Mr. Wuichet called out: "There's no one in that plane. Lieutenant Macready here jumped out in his parachute!"<sup>7</sup> The crowd rejoiced at the sight of the unhurt aviator. Then Mr. Wuichet returned Lt. Macready to McCook Field, where the lieutenant submitted a detailed report to his commanding officer. Despite the officer's advice to spend the next day in bed, Lt. Macready reported for duty the next morning. He had become the first Air Service pilot to make an emergency parachute jump at night and the fourth pilot to have his life saved by parachute.



*Lt. Macready and his young wife and family later resided in Oakwood before moving to Lt. Macready's home state of California. Lt. Macready left the Air Service in 1926, then was recalled to active duty in World War II and served as a colonel until retiring in 1948. Colonel Macready was inducted into the National Aviation Hall of Fame in 1968.*

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Wallace, Sally Macready, 1998, John Macready, Aviation Pioneer: at the Earth's Ceiling, Sunflower University Press, Manhattan, KS, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup>The fact that witnesses on the ground saw a bright light descend from the sky before the airplane crashed indicates Lt. Macready's second flare was delayed in igniting.

<sup>3</sup>"M'Cook Pilot Tells of Leap from Plane in Dark," Dayton Daily News, June 19, 1924, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>"Lieut. Macready's Narrow Escape," Air Service Newsletter, Information Division, Air Service, Washington, DC, July 31, 1924, v. VIII, no. 14, p. 9. A review of aerial photographs from the 1920s suggests the crash site was probably in the general area just northwest of the present-day intersection of Far Hills Avenue and Winding Way in Kettering.

<sup>7</sup>Wallace, p. 137.

### Figure Captions

Figure 1. John A. Macready. (U.S. Air Force)

Figure 2. John A. Macready performing the world's first "crop dusting" near Troy, Ohio. (Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station)

### Rare & Beautiful

Forty-eight classic and special interest automobiles assembled under the tall pines of the Long-Romspert Homestead House Museum grounds as *The Oakwood Historical Society* presented its 7th annual *Classics on the Lawn* Car Show and Open House last Sunday. Auburn, Packard, Cadillac, Ferrari and Rolls Royce were just a few of the marques represented with rare and beautiful as the running theme of this particular gathering. A wide range of years were represented from a 1911 Marmon Speedster to a 2016 Rolls Royce Phantom Drop Head Coupe. A stunning 1928 Auburn Boattail Speedster was another sparkling gem in the crown of the show.

Several hundred guests and car owners enjoyed the warm summer afternoon, tours of *The Homestead* and lunch by *Zombie Dogz* gourmet hot dogs. Many cars from this show have appeared or will appear in the Dayton Concours d'Elegance which is scheduled for September 16 and 17 at Carillon Park.



**OHS Committees**

Please get involved...

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&Lisa Kell  
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mwittmer@gmail.com**Website**Melissa Dalton  
mel@meldalton.com**Upcoming Events!*****Far Hills Speaker Series - September 17th, 2017***Presenting - Milton Wright: Minister, Educator, Editor, and Controversial Bishop  
Presented by: Bob Bowman

Speaker's biography: Bob Bowman was born in Dayton OH and attended the Carlisle OH public schools graduating in 1963. Bob is a physical chemist with degrees from Miami University (B.S.); Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.S.); and California Institute of Technology (Ph.D.). He is currently employed part time by the Oak Ridge National Laboratory providing technical expertise on hydrogen storage materials and systems. He has over 300 technical publications in journals, conference proceedings, and review chapters. Bob is a lifetime member and the Past President of the Franklin Area Historical Society and is also a life member and past president of the United Methodist Historical Society of Ohio. Bob is a trustee on the board of directors for the Mound Museum of Science and Energy in Miamisburg. Bob belongs to several other history and genealogical societies and he is a reenactor as a U.S. Dragoon from the U.S.-Mexican War.

***Annual Fall Photoshoot Fundraiser - September 24th & October 8th***

20 minute appointments available from 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

For over 6 years, members and friends of *The Oakwood Historical Society* have come singly, with family, and/or with pets to have their portraits taken by our photographer Betty Cochran, using our lovely backdrops at TOHS. Place the photos in frames on your mantels and walls, send them with holiday cards to friends, put them in albums and scrapbooks. Make memories for a modest fee and have them to cherish forever while supporting *The Oakwood Historical Society!*

When your session is finished you will take with you all the photos from the session burned onto a disk or memory stick (your choice) along with a waiver allowing you to freely print as many copies as you would like.

This year there will a new option: Santa will be available on both afternoons at no extra cost to add some holiday cheer to some of your photos if you'd like!

Prices are \$65 for members and \$75 for nonmembers, with receipts available for tax purposes. You can reserve your session by calling *The Oakwood Historical Society* at 299-3793, or soon, by going to our web page, [www.oakwoodhistory.org](http://www.oakwoodhistory.org), and signing up there using a credit card.



## Upcoming Events! *(cont)*

### ***Discover Woodland Days - October 1st, 2017 - 12:00, 12:30 & 1:00 p.m.***

Stroll through the historic garden cemetery and meet some of the famous and infamous people who have made Woodland Cemetery their final resting place. Tour guides will escort you through the grounds while volunteer actors depict the various characters.

### ***Halloween at the Haunted Homestead - October 14th, 2017 - 7:00 - 10:00 p.m.***

*A Historically Haunted Halloween Happening for adults 21-over*

Come in costume and join your fellow Oakwoodians for a creepy-fun time. Delicious finger foods and delectable libations provided by *Warped Wing Brewery* presented by *The Oakwood Historical Society*, 1947 Far Hills Ave.

Tickets: \$25 individual, \$40 per couple for Historical Society Members  
\$35 individual, \$50 per couple for non-members

Tickets go on sale September 1st online at [www.oakwoodhistory.org](http://www.oakwoodhistory.org) and also available for purchase from 9:00-1:00 at the *Oakwood Farmers Market* on September 2nd, 16th and 30th. Tickets sales are limited and capped at 140 guests. Get yours before they vanish into the scary, dark night!

### ***Far Hills Speaker Series - October 15th, 2017 - 2:00 p.m.***

Presenting - The Legend of Roswell - Intriguing and iconic UFO story based on eyewitness accounts  
Presented by: Mark W. Risley

## Documenting the Architecture of Oakwood 2017

*The Oakwood Historical Society* has been working on an ambitious project to document via photos every building in the city. We currently have 50 volunteers, ranging from school children to retirees who have taken on a block, street, or area of the city to photograph. There are just a few areas that are not yet assigned; we hope to have volunteers for those areas soon. If you see us set up at the Oakwood Farmer's Market, come on by and take a look at our progress map!

A similar project was recently done by a historical society in a town outside Seattle, Washington, to capture their area at a single point in time. Occupied spaces change over time - people put additions on their houses, change facades, shops change hands, a house goes into a vacant lot.

We look forward to having this record for the future, as one of the most common questions asked of TOHS is if there are photos of Oakwood homes from the past. Often, none have been donated, hence the impetus for TOHS to document our homes for future inquiries.

If you are interested in participating, please leave a message at TOHS at (937) 299-3793,  
or at [info@OakwoodHistory.org](mailto:info@OakwoodHistory.org), and someone will reply ASAP.

If you are one of our volunteers and would like to turn in your completed work, we are now accepting those photos at *The Homestead*. We will let you know about a celebration to be held when everything is complete!



*Park Avenue Antiques*



*"The Oakwood Store"*

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**THE OAKWOOD  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

1947 Far Hills Avenue  
Dayton, OH 45419

**CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED  
DATED MATERIAL**

***The Oakwood Historical Society Membership Form***

**Membership Categories (Please Check One)**

_____ Individual _____	\$25.00
_____ Family _____	\$35.00
_____ Business _____	\$50.00
_____ Bronze _____	\$75.00
_____ Silver _____	\$100.00
_____ Gold _____	\$200.00

\*\$5 Discount:  Student  Senior  Active Military

Date \_\_\_\_\_

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_

Business/Organization (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

The information that you submit will be used only by The Oakwood Historical Society and will not be given or sold to outside parties.  
Please make check payable to: The Oakwood Historical Society, and mail to: 1947 Far Hills Ave. Dayton, OH 45419