Bombs Away

Photo from National Air and Space Museum

Army Lt. Myron Crissy (l), with one of his self-designed bombs, and pilot Philip Parmelee.

Who dropped the first live bomb from a US airplane? In January 1911, Army Lt. Myron Crissy, flying over a San Francisco race track in a Wright airplane piloted by Philip Par-melee (often spelled Parmalee), tossed out 36 pounds of small, self-designed explosive devices. Crissy and Parmelee re-enacted the feat for photographers. The weight of histori-cal opinion thus favors Crissy. Still, some give a bit of credit to Lt. Paul Ward Beck (left). In 1910 at an air meet in Los Angeles, Beck went aloft in a Farman III biplane to stage a crude bomb demonstration using sandbags. He later claimed he and Crissy collaborated on a bomb-dropping device, an assertion Crissy stoutly denied. Neither Crissy nor Beck can lay claim to making the first combat drop. That honor goes to Italian aviator Giulio Gavotti (right), who dropped four grenades from a Taube monoplane on a Turkish encampment in Libya on Nov. 1, 1911.

Paul Ward Beck

Giulio Gavotti