



## MAXWELL

### Death in Manila

On April 6, 1917, the US entered the Great War. It was a matter of instant significance for William C. Maxwell, an obscure student at the University of Alabama. His response would, over time, make his name famous throughout the Air Force.

Maxwell was born into humble circumstances in tiny Natchez, Ala., one of seven children. Their father, John R. Maxwell, and mother, Jennie, moved the family to Atmore, where he grew up.

Maxwell, 24 when war came, was older than the usual undergraduate. He possibly began college late because he lacked the money. When he did arrive in Tuscaloosa, he enrolled as a Reserve Officer's Training Corps student, tuition paid by Uncle Sam.

For Maxwell, however, the war meant college days were over. He abruptly left campus and joined the Army in 1917.

Maxwell wanted to be a military pilot. He was selected for flight school and was sent to Kelly Field, Texas. In April 1918, with his training completed, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Air Service and received his wings.

World War I ended before he could get to it. Maxwell's military flying career continued apace.

In 1919, he was assigned to the 3rd Aero Squadron, which the peacetime Air Service was transferring to the Philippines. Elements arrived in Manila in August 1919 and organized at Fort Stotsenburg.

Soon, Maxwell was generating sorties from a new, air-only section of Stotsenburg: Clark Field. The young aviator was flying the Dayton-Wright DH-4 biplane, a US version of Geoffrey de Havilland's famous two-seat, single-engine British bomber.

On Aug. 12, 1920, disaster struck. Maxwell was on a routine flight when he experienced engine trouble. The 400-hp Liberty engine was usually reliable. On this day, it was not.

Maxwell attempted an emergency landing in a nearby sugarcane field. On approach, losing altitude, he saw that a group of children was playing in a clearing directly in his path. He swerved away and maneuvered into the field.

Hidden in the tall sugarcane, however, was a large flagpole stanchion, and the DH-4 slammed into it. Maxwell died instantly.

He was laid to rest in Robinsonville Baptist Church Cemetery in Atmore, 100 miles from the Montgomery Air Intermediate Depot. At the suggestion of Maxwell's former commander, Maj. Roy C. Brown, the depot was on Nov. 8, 1922, renamed Maxwell Field. Maxwell Air Force Base today is one of USAF's most recognizable names.

The base has a rich history of its own, being one of the world's earliest flying schools (established by the Wright brothers) and site of the famous Air Corps Tactical School in the Air Force's early days.

Today, Maxwell AFB is home to Air University, USAF's premier center for airpower studies, and associated organizations.

### WILLIAM CALVIN MAXWELL

**Born:** Nov. 9, 1892, Natchez, Ala.

**Died:** Aug. 12, 1920, Manila, Philippines

**Occupation:** US military officer

**Service:** ROTC; US Air Service

**Era:** World War I/post-WW I

**Years of Service:** 1917-20

**Grade:** Second Lieutenant

**Combat:** None

**College:** University of Alabama

### MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE

**State:** Alabama

**Nearest City:** Montgomery

**Area:** 6.4 sq mi / 4,100 acres

**Status:** Open, active

**Opened:** (by Army) April 1918

**Original Name:** Wright Field

**Renamed:** Engine and Repair Depot (April 1918)

**Renamed:** Engine and Plane Repair Depot #3 (September 1918)

**Renamed:** Aviation Repair Depot (March 1919)

**Renamed:** Montgomery Air Intermediate Depot (January 1921)

**Renamed:** Maxwell Field (Nov. 8, 1922)

**Named as AFB:** September 1947

**Former Owner:** US Army

**Current Owner:** AETC

**Home Of:** Air University

1. Second Lieutenant William Maxwell, a native of Atmore, Ala., for whom Maxwell Air Force Base is named. Unknown date. 2. Maxwell with a Curtiss Jenny. 3. The Air Corps Tactical School, then located at Maxwell Field. 4. Air University today.