

# WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

*A series of tributes to hometown people and events that have shaped our history.*

## Paul S. Cox



**W**ith ample justification, decorated World War I pilot Paul S. Cox will forever be identified with commercial aviation in Vigo County.

Born Dec. 18, 1896, John S. and Gertrude (Sherburne) Cox's son nourished a youthful fascination for engineering and aeronautics. His father, as chief superintendent of Terre Haute Car & Manufacturing Co., encouraged his interest.

Briefly attending Purdue University after graduating from Terre Haute High School, on May 14, 1917, young Cox enrolled in the first U.S. Army officers' training camp at Fort Benjamin Harrison. Upon completion, 2nd Lt. Cox was transferred to Dayton's Fairfax Field before being named a teacher at the Aviation Instructional School in Issoudun, France, effective Nov. 2, 1917.

On Feb. 12, 1918, Cox was promoted to First Lieutenant and assigned to the 93rd Aero Squadron of the First Army, engaging in significant aerial combat during the Battle of St. Mihiel, France. An eminent pilot in the 3rd Pursuit Group, he was cited on Oct. 10, 1918 for "the destruction, in combat, of an enemy Fokker, in the region of the Dun-sur-Meuse, at 200 meters altitude..."

Upon discharge in 1919, Cox returned to Terre Haute to marry Margaret E. Orman and join his father at John S. Cox & Son, the city's top automotive equipment dealer at 222 South Seventh St. The two families resided at 931 South Seventh St. In 1926, Paul directed the formation of the Terre Haute Airport (Aero) Club, which leased 168 unimproved acres on the city's south edge for an airfield. Receiving support from Fort Harrison American Legion Post No. 40, Cox and other aviation enthusiasts organized Terre Haute Airways Inc. to develop a public airport. With President Cox spearheading the crusade, the organization convinced reluctant politicians that the city needed the facility. Designated Dresser Field, the property was acquired in 1929 for \$82,175.

The venture was an immediate success, but the man chiefly responsible did not enjoy its benefits long. On June 23, 1932, Cox, only 35, and 30-year-old passenger William R. Root (father of Chapman S. Root) were killed when Cox's private aircraft crashed at dusk in a field near Farmersburg. On June 21, 1933—accompanied by a spectacular aerial show—Dresser Field was rededicated "Paul Cox Field" as a memorial to his leadership.

Due to the limited size of Cox Field, plans to handle proposed transcontinental service were rejected by the federal government in 1942, placing the airport's future in jeopardy. Through the generosity of Anton and Mary Hulman, a new aviation complex was constructed on east Poplar Street and dedicated Hulman Field on Oct. 3, 1944. The U.S. Weather Bureau facilities and the Civil Aeronautics Administration office were moved to the new complex in late 1946. Hulman Field was renamed Hulman Regional Airport in 1976.

Cox Field continued to serve the community as an official private airfield until December 18, 1959. Terre Haute South Vigo High School opened on the site in 1971.

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