

MAJOR GENERAL BENJAMIN D. FOULOIS **US Army, Retired (Deceased)**



Benjamin Foulois enlisted in the US Army as a volunteer on 7 July 1898 using his brother's birth certificate. He was sent to Puerto Rico during the Spanish-American War but did not see action except against bandits. In 1899, he enlisted again for service with Company G, 19th Infantry at Camp Meade. He was sent to the Philippines, where he was commissioned on 9 July 1901 after taking a commissioning examination. In September 1901, he was Commanding Officer of Company D, 17th Infantry. In June 1902, Foulois' unit was sent back to the United States and he was stationed at Vancouver Barracks in Washington. In 1903, his regiment was sent back to the Philippines. He assumed command over the Moro Scouts and Philippine Constabulary in May 1905.

In September 1905, Foulois attended the Infantry and Cavalry School at Fort Leavenworth and was accepted into the Signal Corps the following year. He was sent

to Cuba as part of the Army of Cuban Pacification. Promoted to First Lieutenant in 1907, Foulois attended Signal School at Fort Leavenworth, where he wrote a paper titled "The Tactical and Strategic Value of Dirigible Balloons Aerodynamical Flying Machines."

On the strength of his thesis, he was assigned to the Office of the Chief Signal Officer in July 1908 and placed in charge of the Balloon Detachment at Fort Myer, Virginia. He participated in testing aircraft with the Wright Brothers in Maryland and, on 30 July 1909, he was the Army Signal Corps' official observer in the passenger seat of the Wright Flyer when Orville Wright passed the all-important speed trial. Based on the successful completion of the speed test and a previous endurance test, the Army ordered its first airplane, Signal Corps Airplane No. 1, which Foulois took to Fort Sam Houston to continue learning and testing. When the Provisional Aero Company formed in April 1911, Foulois wrote the first regulations governing Army air units.

Foulois was transferred to the 7th Infantry at Fort Leavenworth in November 1912 to establish an aviation center. In 1913, he transferred to the Aviation Center in San Diego to test and continue development of military aviation, including working with the artillery at Fort Sill.

In 1916, during the Punitive Expedition, Foulois commanded the 1st Aero Squadron sent to Mexico to assist GEN John J. Pershing in pursuing Pancho Villa. In December 1916, Foulois was sent to Washington to help establish an Aviation Development organization. The next year, promoted to Brigadier General (temporary), Foulois was made chairman of the Joint Technical Committee. He joined Pershing's staff in France in September 1917 and was placed in charge of aviation in the Zone of Advance. On 27 November 1917, Foulois took over as Chief of Air Service, American Expeditionary Forces (AEF).

After the war, Foulois stayed in France to help on the air terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Returning to the United States in June 1919, he reverted to the permanent rank of Captain (Infantry) and temporary rank of Major (Air Service). After service in the Liquidation Division and testimony before Congress, Foulois was sent to Berlin in 1920 to acquire German air service data. Because the United States had yet to ratify the armistice, Foulois was denied data by the other Allied representatives so he acquired his information from Herman Goering and other Germany pilots. From these contacts, Foulois was able to visit secret German air installations to include underground design shops. In 1924, his service as Attaché ended.

Foulois had been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in 1923. On his return to the United States, he attended the Command and General Staff School and, after graduating, he assumed command of Mitchell Field, Long Island, and the 9th Observation Group.

In 1927, Foulois became the Assistant Chief of the Air Corps. Once again, he was promoted to Brigadier General. During this time he was instrumental in developing long range bombers. In May 1931, he held the Air Corps Coast Defense Exercise and later that year, he was made Chief of the Air Corps and promoted to Major General. After numerous battles with Congress and the administration over issues like Air Mail and an independent Air Force, he retired in 1935.

MG Foulois was the recipient of the Distinguished Service Medal, the Mexican Border Service Medal, the World War I Victory Medal, the French Legion of Honor, Grand Officer, and the Order of the Crown of Italy.

MG Foulois passed away in April 1967. He was posthumously inducted into the MI Hall of Fame in 1988.



Foulois in the Wright Flyer



**Foulois (right) commanded the 1st Aero Squadron during the 1916 Punitive Expedition in Mexico.
A Soldier from that squadron stands with his aircraft (left).**