

The Flight of the Black Wolf Squadron

Thesis:

By 1920, Alaska became economically, politically, and socially stale. Aviation brought a need revitalization to the territory. The Black Wolf Squadron's flight from New York to Nome brought international attention, and promised new industries and commercial opportunities. The flight of the Black Wolf Squadron would begin a new era for Alaska, the era of aviation.

New Enterprise



One of the planes landing at Fairbanks

The creator of the New York to Nome flight, Brigadier General William Mitchell, predicted the flight would bring new commercial routes and establish mail lines in Alaska. In 1924, Captain Carl Eielson started to fly mail between Fairbanks and many outlying villages. Noel Wien began the first Alaskan airline company in 1925.

Heroes of the Air



Three of the eight crew members of the Black Wolf Squadron

For Alaska, these aviators were the first heroes of their kind to enter the territory. After the squadron passed through Fairbanks on August 19, 1920, the *Daily News-Miner*, described the men of the squadron: "They are as husky and fine looking bunch of eight dare devils as ever started a riot."

The International Stage



Alaska State Library - Historical Collection: A squadron plane flying over Juneau

The Black Wolf Squadron brought international attention to Alaska which had been missing since the Nome gold rush. The day after the squadron left New York on July 15, 1920, the Fairbanks *Daily News-Miner* headlined their newspaper with, "Our Air Excursion the Biggest Thing the World Knows Today and All Eyes Are Turned On Us."

The Route



Two of the squadron planes at Jasper, Alberta

The planned route began in New York, then passed through nine different states in America., five different cities and towns in Canada, and four towns in Alaska, including Nome (route shown in red on the background.) Four, two-seater De Havilland biplanes were chosen to carry the eight crewmen to Nome and back. On May 4, 1920, the War Department approved the Black Wolf Squadron's flight. The flight began on July 15 of that year, and did not end until October 20.

Conclusion:

The Black Wolf Squadron formed an identity around aviation that still remains a strong part of Alaska's Western cultural identity. The flight proved that planes could be flown in the Alaskan territory. This fact would provide a basis for new commercial enterprises, a new type of hero in the pioneer aviator, and connections never before possible.