

## Wing walking and the **United States Air Force**... bound together since 1918!

Ormer Locklear is the first man credited with bringing wing walking to the forefront of American aviation and airshows. He joined the US Army Air Service in the fall of 1917, just prior to his 26<sup>th</sup> birthday, and was stationed at Barron Field, Texas. While there are a variety of reasons given for Lt. Ormer Locklear's first walk out on the wing in 1918, the New York Times reports in an [August 4, 1920 article](#) that he had originally begun wing walking because,

*He conceived the idea that it would be possible to mount machine guns on the wings of a plane. Army officers said it would be impossible to manoeuvre with a man's weight on the extreme edge of the wings, and some of his first "stunts" were done to demonstrate that a plane so weighted could be manoeuvred.*

According to the [US Centennial of Flight Commission](#),

*Although Locklear could have been court-martialed for such antics, his commanding officer encouraged him, instead, to perform more "stunts" because they boosted his colleagues' moral, and their confidence in the soundness of their Jenny biplanes, which were suffering a rash of accidents at the time.*

In short, the early USAF saw wing walking as a fantastic and successful recruiting technique!

The art of wing walking soon took off as other pilots who watched Locklear started developing their own stunts. Lt. Locklear was honorably discharged in the spring of 1919 and chose to become a barnstormer by profession. Established as the "King of the Wing Walkers," America honored him during "Locklear Days" at various county fairs. He quickly became an international star. Perfecting handstands, hanging stunts, and many other skills on the wings of his Jenny biplane, Locklear truly laid the foundation on which wing walking still rests.

Additionally, Locklear was the first person to transfer from one plane to another in flight. This is what inspired and led to the world's first air-to-air refueling in 1919. Wesley May, with a five gallon can of gasoline strapped to his back, transferred from a Standard flown by Frank Hawks to a Jenny piloted by Earl Daugherty ("Chewing Gum, Bailing Wire, and Guts" by Bill Rhode, 1970).

There is no doubt that wing walking and the United States Air Force have a long history together – one that should be cherished by the military and civilians alike, as we have all benefited from the risks accepted by this daring young man who served his country and was proud to call himself a Barnstormer!

*I don't do these things because I want to run the risk of being killed. I do it to demonstrate what can be done. Somebody has got to show the way someday we will all be flying and the more things that are attempted and accomplished, the quicker we will get there. –Ormer Locklear*