



A Corinth Native

What does a famed aviator have to do with the Civil War in Mississippi?

A native of Corinth, Roscoe was born on September 29, 1895, the eldest son of farmer Robert Lee Turner and his wife Mary. His parents bought a large parcel of land on the west side of town in 1903. Later known as Turner Hill, the low ridge on their land overlooked Turner Creek.

The Civil War

On October 3rd and 4th 1862, during the Battle of Corinth, the property along the narrow creek was crossed repeatedly by the two contending armies. On the morning of October 4th, Maj. Gen. Mansfield Lovell's division was ordered to attack the Union left flank as the final blow of a three-division en echelon assault. On the property soon to be owned by the Turner's waited the Confederate brigade of Brig. Gen. John Villepigue. They would be the first of

Lovell's troops to join the attack. Lovell, however, never committed his soldiers, and left to themselves, the other two divisions were defeated by the Union army. The Battle was over. The Northern army was victorious. Controversy and debate have shadowed Lovell's decision ever since.

Could the Confederates have succeeded if he had joined the attack?

Early Life

Roscoe attended Glover School in West Corinth and completed the 10th grade, the highest level then available in Corinth. He studied at a local business college for six months and held a number of his jobs, but his days were often spent on the family farm. "Looking at the rumps of two mules all day in the hot sun made me resolve that I didn't want to grow up to be a farmer." At the age of sixteen he moved to Memphis, TN.

With dreams of being an auto mechanic, Roscoe's ambition was fueled by the opportunities of the big city. He progressed from mechanic, to chauffeur, dispatch clerk and salesman, always attributing his successful interviews to sharp clothes and a well-groomed appearance.



Taking to the Air



Roscoe saw his first airplane in 1913 and determined to become a pilot. His application for flight training with the Army was rejected due to a lack of a college education. Roscoe's hopes were revived during WWI. In March 1918, he became a balloon pilot with the rank of 2nd Lieutenant. Whenever the opportunity arose, he took unofficial training lessons flying airplanes.



After the war, Turner became an airplane mechanic. With a partner he performed on the cross-country barnstorming circuit, thrilling crowds as a wing-walker and parachutist. Corinth was his base of operations where he worked as augmented his income with auto sales and repairs. In 1927, he became the owner/pilot of his own charter airline service.



Golden Age of Aviation



Roscoe found work in Hollywood flying in films and doubling as an aerial stunt advisor. He rubbed elbows with celebrities and was instantly recognizable by his jaunty moustache and a big toothy grin. He habitually wore a striking uniform of his own design with a blue uniform coat, tan jodhpurs and polished riding boots.

In the early 1930's Roscoe was flying and winning aviation races throughout the country. Next to professional baseball, air racing drew the largest crowds of any sporting event. He won prizes and trophies as his powerful race planes took him to many high-profile victories. In the process he set air speed records at local events and transcontinental flights.



Gilmore the Lion



One of Roscoe's many sponsors was Gilmore Oil whose logo was the "Red Lion." Turner adopted a small lion cub, appropriately named Gilmore, who became his steadfast flying partner.

Always in the spotlight, the famous little lion had his own custom parachute, but as he grew into adulthood, he was permanently grounded due to his massive size and weight. Gilmore died in 1952 with his old flying buddy holding his paw.



Legacy

Roscoe's achievements were recognized by Congress when he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Since he was presented with this prestigious medal in 1949, no other civilian aviator has since been honored with this award. Roscoe Turner died in 1970 and the Roscoe Turner Airport

in Corinth recalls the life of this legendary local aviator. With the help of the American Battlefield Trust, the Turner home place is now one of the many properties that comprise the Corinth Unit of Shiloh National Military Park.

