FIGHTING THE FLYING CIRCUS

BY

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WITH MAPS AND A FOREWORD BY
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heavenward. After thirty minutes industriously occu-
pied in throwing my pursuers off my trail, I vent-
tured out of concealment and gratefully made my way
home. There on the field two of my dear old com-
rades were waiting for me to come in. What anxiety
they would have suffered if they had known what I had
just been through!

"Hello, Rick! Why the devil didn't you wait for
us?" Doug Campbell inquired, as I began to climb out
of my machine. "We chased you all over France try-
ing to catch up with you!"

"Where did you go, Eddie, after we lost you in
those clouds?" demanded Charley Chapman, looking
at me interestedly as he leaned against my suspended
leg. "We've been home almost half an hour!"
Here, it seemed were the two pilots—American in-
stead of Boche—who had been chasing me.

I thought very intently for a quarter of a second.
Then I pushed Chapman away and descended from my
machine.

"I thought I remembered seeing a Boche back in
Germany and went back to make sure," I replied eas-
ily. "But I guess I was mistaken."

CHAPTER IV

DOWNING MY FIRST HUN

It will be noticed that my preparation for combat
fighting in the air was a gradual one. As I look
back upon it now, it seems that I had the rare good
fortune to experience almost every variety of danger
that can beset the war pilot before I ever fired a shot
at an enemy from an aeroplane.

This good fortune is rare, it appears to me. Many
a better man than myself has leaped into his stride and
begun accumulating victories from his very first flight
over the lines. It was a brilliant start for him and
his successes brought him instant renown. But he
had been living on the cream at the start and was un-
used to the skim-milk of aviation. One day the cream
gave out and the first dose of skim-milk terminated
his career.

So despite the weeks and weeks of disappointment
that attended my early fighting career, I appreciated
even then the enormous benefit that I would reap later
from these experiences. I can now most solemnly
affirm that had I won my first victory during my first
trips over the lines I believe I would never have sur-
vived a dozen combats. Every disappointment that
came to me brought with it an enduring lesson that
repaid me eventually tenfold. If any one of my an-
tagonists had been through the same school of disap-
pointments that had so annoyed me it is probable that
he, instead of me, would now be telling his friends back
home about his series of victories over the enemy.

April in France is much like April anywhere else.
Rains and cloudy weather appear suddenly out of a
clear sky and flying becomes out of the question or
very precarious at best. On the 29th of April, 1918,
we rose at six o'clock and stuck our heads out of doors
as usual for a hasty survey of a dismal sky. For the
past three or four days it had rained steadily. No
patrols had gone out from our aerodrome. If they
had gone they would not have found any enemy air-
craft about, for none had been sighted from the lines
along our sector.

About noon the sun suddenly broke through and our
hopes began to rise. I was slated for a patrol that
afternoon and from three o'clock on I waited about the
hangars watching the steadily clearing sky. Captain
Hall and I were to stand on alert until six o'clock that
night at the aerodrome. Precisely at five o'clock Cap-
tain Hall received a telephone call from the French headquarters at Beaumont stating that an enemy two-seater machine had just crossed our lines and was flying south over their heads.

Captain Hall and I had been walking about the field with our flying clothes on and our machines were standing side by side with their noses pointing into the wind. Within the minute we had jumped into our seats and our mechanics were twirling the propellers. Just then the telephone sergeant came running out to us and told Captain Hall to hold his flight until the Major was ready. He was to accompany us and would be on the field in two minutes.

While the sergeant was delivering the message I was scanning the northern heavens and there I suddenly picked up a tiny speck against the clouds above the Forêt de la Reine, which I was convinced must be the enemy plane we were after. The Major was not yet in sight. Our motors were smoothly turning over and everything was ready.

Pointing out the distant speck to Jimmy Hall, I begged him to give the word to go before we lost sight of our easy victim. If we waited for the Major we might be too late.

To my great joy Captain Hall acquiesced and immediately ordered the boys to pull away the blocks from our wheels. His motor roared as he opened up his throttle and in a twinkling both our machines were running rapidly over the surface of the field. Almost side by side we arose and climbing swiftly, soared away in a straight line after our distant Boche.

In five minutes we were above our observation balloon line which stretches along some two miles or so behind the front. I was on Jimmy's right wing and off to my right in the direction of Pont-à-Mousson I could still distinguish our unsuspecting quarry. Try as I might I could not induce the Captain to turn in that direction, though I dipped my wings, darted away from him and tried in every way to attract his attention to the target which was so conspicuous to me. He stupidly continued on straight north.

I determined to sever relations with him and take on the Boche alone, since he evidently was generous enough to give me a clear field. Accordingly I swerved swiftly away from Captain Hall and within five minutes overhauled the enemy and adroitly maneuvered myself into an ideal position just under his sheltering tail. It was a large three-seater machine and a brace of guns poked their noses out to the rear over my head. With fingers closing on my triggers I prepared for a dash upwards and quickly pulled back my stick. Up I zoomed until my sights began to travel along the length of the fuselage overhead. Suddenly they rested on a curiously familiar looking device. It was the French circular cocard painted brightly under each wing! Up to this time I had not even thought of looking for its nationality, so certain had I been that this must be the Boche machine that had been sighted by the French headquarters.

Completely disgusted with myself, I viraged abruptly away from my latest blunder, finding some little satisfaction in witnessing the startled surprise of the three Frenchmen aboard the craft, who had not become aware of my proximity until they saw me flash past them. At any rate I had stalked them successfully and might have easily downed them if they had been Boches. But as it was, it would be a trifle difficult to face Jimmy Hall again and explain to him why I had left him alone to get myself five miles away under the tail of a perfectly harmless ally three-seater. I looked about to discover Jimmy's whereabouts.

There he was cavorting about amidst a thick barrage of black shell-bursts across the German lines. He was half-way to St. Mihiel and a mile or two in-
side Hun territory. Evidently he was waiting for me to discover my mistake and then overtake him, for he was having a delightful time with the Archy gunners, doing loops, barrels, side-slips and spins immediately over their heads to show them his contempt for them, while he waited for his comrade. Finally he came out of the Archy area with a long graceful dive and swinging up alongside my machine he wiggled his wings as though he were laughing at me and then suddenly he set a course back towards Pont-à-Mousson.

Whether or not he knew all along that a German craft was in that region I could not tell. But when he began to change his direction and curve up into the sun I followed close behind him knowing that there was a good reason for this maneuver. I looked earnestly about me in every direction.

Yes! There was a scout coming towards us from north of Pont-à-Mousson. It was at about our altitude. I knew it was a Hun the moment I saw it, for it had the familiar lines of their new Pfalz. Moreover, my confidence in James Norman Hall was such that I knew he couldn't make a mistake. And he was still climbing into the sun, carefully keeping his position between its glare and the oncoming fighting plane. I clung as closely to Hall as I could. The Hun was steadily approaching us, unconscious of his danger, for we were full in the sun.

With the first downward dive of Jimmy's machine I was by his side. We had at least a thousand feet advantage over the enemy and we were two to one numerically. He might outdive our machines, for the Pfalz is a famous diver, while our faster climbing Nieuports had a droll little habit of shedding their fabric when plunged too furiously through the air. The Boche hadn't a chance to outfly us. His only salvation would be in a dive towards his own lines.

These thoughts passed through my mind in a flash and I instantly determined upon my tactics. While Hall went in for his attack I would keep my altitude and get a position the other side of the Pfalz, to cut off his retreat.

No sooner had I altered my line of flight than the German pilot saw me leave the sun's rays. Hall was already half-way to him when he stuck up his nose and began furiously climbing to the upper ceiling. I let him pass me and found myself on the other side just as Hall began firing. I doubt if the Boche had seen Hall's Nieuport at all.

Surprised by discovering this new antagonist, Hall, ahead of him, the Pfalz immediately abandoned all idea of a battle and banking around to the right started for home, just as I had expected him to do. In a trice I was on his tail. Down, down we sped with throttles both full open. Hall was coming on somewhere in my rear. The Boche had no heart for evolutions or maneuvers. He was running like a scared rabbit, as I had run from Campbell. I was gaining upon him every instant and had my sights trained dead upon his seat before I fired my first shot.

At 150 yards I pressed my triggers. The tracer bullets cut a streak of living fire into the rear of the Pfalz tail. Raising the nose of my aeroplane slightly the fiery streak lifted itself like the stream of water pouring from a garden hose. Gradually it settled into the pilot's seat. The swerving of the Pfalz course indicated that its rudder no longer was held by a directing hand. At 2000 feet above the enemy's lines I pulled up my headlong dive and watched the enemy machine continuing on its course. Curving slightly to the left the Pfalz circled a little to the south and the next minute crashed onto the ground just at the edge of the woods a mile inside their own lines. I had brought down my first enemy aeroplane and had not been subjected to a single shot!
Hall was immediately beside me. He was evidently as pleased as I was over our success, for he danced his machine about in incredible maneuvers. And then I realized that old friend Archy was back on the job. We were not two miles away from the German antiaircraft batteries and they put a furious bombardment of shrapnel all about us. I was quite ready to call it a day and go home, but Captain Hall deliberately returned to the barrage and entered it with me at his heels. Machine-guns and rifle fire from the trenches greeted us and I do not mind admitting that I got out quickly the way I came in without any unnecessary delay, but Hall continued to do stunts over their heads for ten minutes, surpassing all the acrobatics that the enraged Boches had ever seen even over their own peaceful aerodromes.

Jimmy exhausted his spirits at about the time the Huns had exhausted all their available ammunition and we started blithely for home. Swooping down to our field side by side, we made a quick landing and taxied our victorious machines up to the hangars. Then jumping out we ran to each other, extending glad hands for our first exchange of congratulations. And then we noticed that the squadron pilots and mechanics were streaming across the aerodrome towards us from all directions. They had heard the news while we were still dodging shrapnel and were hastening out to welcome our return. The French had telephoned in a confirmation of my first victory, before I had had time to reach home. Not a single bullet hole had punctured any part of my machine.

There is a peculiar gratification in receiving congratulations from one's squadron for a victory in the air. It is worth more to a pilot than the applause of the whole outside world. It means that one has won the confidence of men who share the misgivings, the aspirations, the trials and the dangers of aeroplane fighting. And with each victory comes a renewal and re-cementing of ties that bind together these brothers-in-arms. No closer fraternity exists in the world than that of the air-fighters in this great war. And I have yet to find one single individual who has attained conspicuous success in bringing down enemy aeroplanes who can be said to be spoiled either by his successes or by the generous congratulations of his comrades. If he were capable of being spoiled he would not have had the character to have won continuous victories, for the smallest amount of vanity is fatal in aeroplane fighting. Self-distrust rather is the quality to which many a pilot owes his protracted existence.

It was with a very humble gratitude then that I received the warm congratulations of Lufbery, whom I had always revered for his seventeen victories — of Doug Campbell and Alan Winslow who had brought down the first machines that were credited to the American Squadrons, and of many others of 94 Squadron who had seen far more service in the battle areas than had I. I was glad to be at last included in the proud roll of victors of this squadron. These pals of mine were to see old 94 lead all American Squadrons in the number of successes over the Huns.

The following day I was notified that General Gerard, the Commanding Officer of the Sixth French Army, had offered to decorate Captain Hall and myself in the name of the French Government for our victory of the day before. We were then operating in conjunction with this branch of the French Army. The Croix de Guerre with palm was to be accorded each of us, provided such an order met the approval of our own government. But at that time officers in the American Army could not accept decorations from a foreign Government, so the ceremony of presenta-
tion was denied us. Both Captain Hall and myself had been included, as such was the French rule where two pilots participated in a victory.

The truth was that in the tense excitement of this first victory, I was quite blind to the fact that I was shooting deadly bullets at another aviator; and if I had been by myself, there is no doubt in my own mind but that I should have made a blunder again in some particular which would have reversed the situation. Captain Hall’s presence, if not his actual bullets, had won the victory and had given me that wonderful feeling of self-confidence which made it possible for me subsequently to return to battle without him and handle similar situations successfully.

CHAPTER V

JIMMY MEISSNER STRIPS HIS WINGS

FROM the entries in my diary of this April period one would get rather an unfavorable opinion of that quarter of France in which our Squadron was located. “Rain and Mud!” “Dud Weather!” “No flying to-day!” are a few of the samples. None of the pilots or enlisted men of our American flying squadrons will be easily enraptured in the days to come with descriptions of the romance of this part of La Belle France. The villages are dismal and dirty. Every householder rejoices in the size and stench of his manure heap, which always decorates the entire area in front of his house. Sidewalks there are none. The streets slop with mud of the clinging variety, and even in the larger cities themselves the American finds but little to interest him. An overwhelming love for his own country is the most enduring souvenir the American soldier in France gained from his visits to these towns of the Vosges and the Meuse.

To add to our irritation, we felt that every day we lost by bad weather was injuring American aviation in the eyes of our Allies. The British and the French had had three years and more of air fighting and the veterans of these squadrons looked upon the American pilots with something of amusement and something of polite contempt. They had believed in the story of our twenty thousand aeroplanes which had been promised by April. Here was April at hand and we were flying ill-equipped machines that we fortunately had been able to wangle out of the French and English. Our pilots were not trained under the veteran leadership that England could provide and our methods were crude and new. Our spirit and determination were perhaps never doubted by our Allies, but we all of us felt that we must show these more experienced squadrons that we could equal them in any department of aviation, even with our inferior machines, if we only might have the opportunity for flying. And still the rain continued!

The day after my first enemy machine was brought down we were unable on account of the fog to carry out our air patrols. That afternoon a group of American newspaper men came out to the aerodrome to talk to me about my sensations in shooting down another man’s machine. They took photographs of me and jotted down notes and finally requested me to make a short flight over the field and perform a few stunts. The weather was not too rough for such an exhibition, so I gladly complied and for half an hour I rolled and looped and dived about the clouds a thousand feet or so above the aerodrome. But the visibility was so bad that I could not see the ground a mile away from the field.

On May first Major Lubbery and I made a little at-
den elation began to sweep over me. I boldly tried lifting her head. No use! She would fly straight but that was all. Ah! here comes friend Archy!

It is curious that one gets so accustomed to Archy that its terrors actually disappear. So grateful was I to the crippled little 'bus for not letting me down that I continued to talk to her and promise her a good rub down when we reached the stable. I hardly realized that Archy was trying to be nasty.

Over the lines I slid, a good thousand feet up. Once freed from the danger of landing in Germany, I tried several small tricks and succeeded in persuading the damaged craft to one more effort. I saw the roofs of my hangar before me. With the motor still running wide open I grazed the tops of the old 94 hangar and pancaked flatly upon my field.

The French pilots from an adjoining hangar came running out to see what novice was trying to make a landing with his motor on. Later they told me I resembled a bird alighting with a broken wing.

I had passed through rather a nervous experience, as I look back upon it now. Yet I do not recall that I felt anything unusual had happened, as I slid over the edge of my cockpit and inquired for Reed Chambers. This is one of the curious results of flying in wartime: A species of fatalism soon possesses a pilot to such an extent that he learns to take everything as a matter of course. Rarely does a pilot betray much excitement over the day's work, no matter how extraordinary it is.

So I inquired for Reed Chambers with some anger as I got out of my machine. I felt that he had deserted me. I remember that was the principal feeling that attended me across the aerodrome.

Reed hadn't been heard from. But a few minutes later he blew in, full of some cock-and-bull story about my running away from him in violation of our agree-

ment. He had been back in Germany also, and in coming out he had met the two Albatros machines who were then returning home to their aerodrome, possibly to get a motorcar and hurry down to view my remains. Reed had not seen my combat nor did he notice me flying my crippled bird homewards. But his report of seeing only two Albatros confirmed my expectations that the third had actually gone down to a final crash.

Early next day the French notified us that they had indeed seen the Albatros machine crash and had noticed my crippled Nieuport staggering homewards from the fight, surrounded with Archy. They thus confirmed my victory without any request on my part. And the extraordinary part of the whole affair was that the dead German pilot — my latest victim — had so fallen upon his controls that the machine flew towards France and landed with his dead body a few hundred yards inside the French line.

CHAPTER IX

DOWN IN FLAMES

The 94th Squadron had been at the front about one month when there arrived Lieut. Kurtz, one of my companions of the training school days. On completion of his course at the flying school Kurtz had been selected to make a special study of aerial gunnery, in order to become an instructor to the thousands of young men who were now being drafted into Uncle Sam's aerial fleet. For this purpose he had been sent to England, and on returning to France from that country Kurtz had received orders to report to the 94th Squadron at the front in order to secure actual war experience and to make trips over the enemy's lines.
After the newcomer had asked thousands of questions and received answers to them to the best of our ability, he suggested that he should proceed to the more advanced stage of an actual combat with the enemy. As I was second in command of the Squadron, being Flight Commander of the 1st Flight at that time, it was my duty to arrange for him to accompany a patrol into enemy territory. No matter how much natural ability a man may possess, or how carefully he has been trained, his first experiences over the enemy lines, his first contact with enemy machines are rather trying to him. A moment’s forgetfulness, a trifling foolhardiness, a slight miscalculation, and even a man who has been carefully and expensively trained and who possesses all the characteristics of a successful pilot, may fall before the skill of a more experienced enemy flyer.

For this reason I always made it a practice to accompany new pilots on their first trip over the enemy’s lines, and by my advice and by actual protection when aloft, assist them over that delicate period between the theory of the school and the hard practice of battle.

We were still flying the well-known Baby Nieuport single-seater “chasse” or fighting machine, equipped with a Gnome Monosoupape motor. It was then the best machine of its kind in service, although it had some faults undeniably. Having just arrived from the rear, Kurtz was not acquainted with the peculiarities of this machine. I therefore arranged for him to make a few short flights from our field and to practice frequent landings, so that if he ever should have sudden motor trouble he would be able to come down on any ground he found available. After a few days of this practice, he expressed himself as being capable of handling the machine under all circumstances and ready for that greatest adventure of the young pilot: that first trip over enemy’s lines.

We agreed that Lieut. Kurtz should accompany Lieut. Chambers and myself on what is familiarly known as a voluntary patrol. Chambers and I were in the habit of undertaking these extra patrols when the regular day’s work was over, provided we were still, to use an aviator’s slang expression, “Mad at the Boche.” It was a beautiful summer morning, bright, clear and still—just such a morning as the Hun observation pilots would select to come over our lines and take photographs.

Our plan of action was carefully explained to our new comrade. We were to fly in V formation; I was to lead, Chambers on my left, and Kurtz 100 meters behind and above us. He was not to engage in a combat, should we meet with any Boche airmen, unless the advantage was with us. I have always made it a point to avoid a fight unless I can maneuver to get the best advantage. He was at all times to maintain his position behind and above us, playing the rôle of a spectator. He was instructed to try out his machine-gun occasionally with a few short bursts if he had his plane pointing towards Germany. Finally, if we became scattered and he was unable to find us, he was to remember that the sun rose in the east, and, keeping it on his left was to fly south until he felt certain that he was over French territory before making a landing.

It was decided that we should start after breakfast, promptly at 8 o’clock, meet over the field at 1500 feet, get our full altitude between Nancy and Toul, and cross over the lines at 15,000 feet. Before starting I noticed that Lieut. Kurtz appeared rather nervous, but this was not a matter for surprise under the circumstances. Little did I understand the reason for this nervousness then, or suspect in what a tragic manner it would later be revealed to me.

Lieut. Kurtz’s machine was climbing badly, so we got up to an altitude of 14,500 feet rather slowly; at
that height I decided to pass from the comparative safety of our own side of the line to the hazard and adventure of the German positions. Mr. Hun was abroad, for I caught sight of the shimmer of what I believed to be a photo plane six miles inside our lines and very high up — probably 19,000 feet. As this enemy was certainly beyond our reach, I decided to keep the nose of my machine headed towards Germany and to continue to gain altitude as steadily as possible, at the same time keeping an eye on this nearby enemy, for there was just a chance that we might be able to reach his altitude and head him off before his work was done.

Suddenly, little fleecy white puffs appeared in the clear atmosphere ahead and above us. This anti-aircraft activity of ours meant that more Huns were abroad in our vicinity. A few minutes more and we had spotted them; three powerful single-seaters of the Albatros type, 1500 feet above us, and about half a mile ahead. As a signal to the others I wig-wagged my wings, which is the aviator's way of saying "Look out, and keep your eye on the leader." I had time to look back and see that Lieut. Kurtz was well in the rear, and a little higher than the enemy then appeared to be. There was then no reason to fear for him. It was not necessary to give any thought to an experienced fighter like Lieut. Chambers. I had been out enough with Reed to know that he was the equal to any two Huns. Doubtless Reed had seen the Boches before I had, for he was keeping close by me, probably wondering what my plan was going to be.

Keeping a close watch on our opponents, I rapidly analyzed the situation. The enemy had the advantage in height; they were three, probably all experienced men, while we were two fighters and one novice, who was catching sight of a German plane for the first time in his life. But the enemy pilots were inside our lines. Down below, several hundreds of men in the trenches were watching what to them was to be an equal fight — three Americans against three Germans. With their field glasses the French officers had picked out the black German crosses, and noted the red, blue and white rings of the U. S. machines. Doubtless at that very moment they were discussing the outcome of the impending fight. They had the right to expect a fight, since we were 3 to 3. So a fight it should be.

In the minds of the Germans there appeared to be no element of doubt or hesitation. Having the advantage of height, they suddenly, all three, swooped down on us; first one, then the second and third dived down and sprayed us with bullets from their machine-guns. I had time to notice that Lieut. Chambers banked up on a wing tip and dived down; I did a half roll, and in less time than it takes to tell, we were both out of range. The Germans in their diving attack had not only failed to get any of us, but had also lost their advantage of height. The tables were turned, or at any rate the conditions were equal, and retreat was evidently the uppermost thought in the minds of the Huns.

We gave chase and in a few minutes I had succeeded in separating one of the planes from the formation. It was then either his life or mine! Perhaps I should get in the fatal shot; or maybe luck would be on his side; in either case, I was determined that it should be a fight to the death. Occupied as I was with my own enemy, I yet had time to notice that Lieut. Kurtz was doing well. He and Lieut. Chambers were in full cry after the two remaining Albatros planes; the whole show was proceeding in the direction of St. Mihiel.

Mine was a running fight until we arrived over Thiaucourt, the little city about six miles inside the German lines. Here my enemy decided that conditions were in his favor, for he swung around and headed straight for me. But I was satisfied to accept
the challenge, for I was 100 yards behind and about 200 yards above my opponent, and this gave me a not to be despised advantage. Nearer and nearer he came, heading towards me in a climbing virage, and working both his machine-guns furiously. It is a sensation which almost defies description: there we were, only a few yards apart, sparring around one another like two prize-fighters in a celestial ring. His incendiary explosive bullets were cracking all around me, and any one of them, if it touched a vital spot, was capable of putting an end to the fight. But my feelings were not personal; indeed, in those few critical moments which constitute the turning point of a fight the aviator usually has all thoughts of self driven away. With a quick half-turn of a virille I secured a position on the tail of my enemy. I was then in such a position that he was unable to turn his gun on me. It was my chance, a chance which probably would be lost in the next fraction of a second. But I had no intention of losing it. With a pull on both triggers, a hail of bullets swept towards the German plane.

Down he swooped. Apparently he was out of control. Would he crash, or would he be able after that giddy dive to pull out and make a safe landing? That I could not tell, for while the spinning nose-dive of an enemy always looks like certain destruction, it is often, in the hands of an artful pilot the only highway to safety. Had I been over our own lines, I might have followed him down, and made certain of his crash. If I saw that he had regained control I could then immediately renew the fight at a lower altitude.

But I was well inside enemy territory and only 10,000 feet above ground. It was quite possible that while I had been occupied in this fight other enemy planes had gathered overhead and were preparing to wreak vengeance. Personal safety and the elementary rules of aerial fighting require the pilot in such circumstances to "regain altitude, or get back to the lines as soon as possible."

Thus I had to leave the issue of my fight in doubt. I had a faint hope that some other observer might be able to confirm the enemy's crash, and so allow me to place one more Hun to my credit. A few minutes later and I realized that my recent instinctive fears were only too true. High above, but fortunately a considerable distance away from me, approached two German planes, which I rapidly concluded were the two machines which had succeeded in escaping from Kurtz and Chambers and were now determined to punish me when they discovered me so remotely isolated from my formation.

My only hope of safety lay in speed. Often and often on the race track, with wide open throttle, every nerve taut, every pent-up ounce of energy concentrated in my arms, have I wished that I could infuse just a little more power into my engine, could give just a little more speed to my car, in order to draw away from the man whose car was creeping up to and overhauling mine inch by inch.

But this case was even more crucial. Speed now meant safety, speed here meant life. My motor was flung wide open, the nose of my machine was turned down, and I raced as I had never raced before, for the prize was life itself. But do what I could, it was impossible to shake off one of my opponents. Now I was directly over the lines; a few minutes more and I should be in our own territory and in a position either to land or get away from my persistent rival. However, the advantage the other fellow had in height was too much for me, and I realized that it was best for me to turn round and fight. In a flash I had kicked my tail around and was heading towards my opponent. He swooped down, reserving his fire,
while I kept my fingers on the triggers of my guns. I had him in range, but I hesitated; the thought had flashed through my brain that perhaps in three seconds more I should be able to shoot with more deadly effect.

Now I had my sights on him; now was the time to release both guns. At that very moment his machine banked up on one wing tip, and there under the lower wing I saw the concentric red, blue and white wings of the United States Air Service. The supposed Hun was friend Chambers, who was returning from chasing the enemy, and the second plane was that of Lieut. Kurtz back from his first aerial scrap. God only knows why I held my fire for that brief fraction of a second. In talking it over later, Chambers said, "When I saw Rick swing round in that wild fashion I realized that he was still 'mad at the Boche,' and thought the time had come to let him see my colors."

It is not often that a man rises to the degree of joy I felt as we headed for home, the fight over, and all three safe. I had every reason to believe my German was down, possibly Chambers had got another, and Kurtz for his first time ever had deported himself wonderfully.

I searched around for the pilot Kurtz, whom I regarded as being in my care, but to my surprise was unable to find him. I cruised around for a few minutes, searching in every direction, but not one plane could I see in the sky. I argued to myself that he must have gone home, and in consequence I turned my machine towards our aerodrome, hoping to pick him up at any moment. Just as I got sight of our landing ground my anxiety was relieved, for there, ahead of and below us was Lieut. Kurtz making rings above our field, exactly as I had advised him to do.

Lieut. Kurtz was evidently on his last turn over an adjoining field prior to landing when to my unspeakably horror I saw his Nieuport drop into a vrilie and crash straight to earth, after which bursts of angry flame shot up all around him. What could possibly have happened?

If help could be got to him without a moment's delay he might be pulled out of that wreckage before the flames consumed him. But I could not get to him, for the place where his machine had crashed was among barbed wire entanglements and trench works so thick that a safe landing was impossible. Below was a road, only 50 yards from the burning machine, and on the road was a French "camion." I speeded down, shut off my motor, and by signs and voice urged the driver to go to the rescue. The man stood still and watched. I realized later that he understood it was a hopeless task, for all the ammunition in the wrecked plane was exploding, and for any man to approach meant almost certain death.

Unable to land close by, I sped on to our own field, jumped out of my plane almost before it had stopped rolling; vaulted into the saddle of a motorcycle and raced towards the scene of the disaster with a vague wild hope that I might yet be able to do some good. Could I live for a million years I should not forget that awful sight of the charred remains of the man who had been my companion in the schools, and who only one brief hour before had set out with me full of life and hope.

A few hours later the mystery of that crash was revealed. As has already been mentioned, I had noticed before starting that Lieut. Kurtz appeared nervous, but had not given the matter any great consideration. The explanation was given by a brother officer who had come with Lieut Kurtz to the squadron. Before starting on his last flight, Lieut. Kurtz had confided to him that he was subject to fainting spells when exposed to high altitudes, and the only thing he was
afraid of was that he might be seized with such a fit while in the air. Alas, his fear had been only too well founded. But what a pity it was he had not confided this fear to me, his Flight Commander!

The next morning a simple funeral procession wound its way down the leafy lanes, the while shells passed overhead with an incongruous whistle. Awaiting me at the camp on my return from this sad ceremony was an official notice from the French commander. It stated, briefly, that an infantry officer, on outpost duty in No Man’s Land, had observed that the German I had fought with had crashed to the ground a total wreck. I had got my Boche; but I had lost a friend, and he had perished in the manner most dreaded of all aviators, for he had gone down in flames.

CHAPTER X

LUFBERY IS KILLED

LEUTENANT WALTER SMYTH, of New York, came to me on the morning of May 10th, 1918, and said:

“Rick, where do you find all these Boches of yours over the lines?”

I asked him what he meant by “all.”

“Why,” he said, “I’ve been over the lines two or three times and I haven’t had a single look at an enemy machine. I would like to go across with some one like you who always gets into some fun. Will you take me with you on a voluntary patrol?”

This was the spirit I liked to see in a pilot and I immediately told Smyth I would take him over at nine o’clock this very morning if he could get ready. My regular patrol was not on until late in the afternoon, so I had all the morning to myself. Smyth was de-
FIGHTING THE FLYING CIRCUS

One of the Frenchmen shot a fox that Sunday morning and we all returned to the village tavern for a glass of wine, highly delighted with the successful day’s sport. The Mayor especially congratulated us upon our fortunate escape from the savage wild boar.

Upon my suggesting to His Honor that his beaters-up had occupied a somewhat dangerous position at the crucial moment for firing, he shook his head sorrowfully and replied:

“Yes, it is too true! They are unfortunately wounded at times.” Then clearing up his countenance, with a gleam of pride he added:

“But they are good boys. They have accustomed themselves to the danger and they do not shrink.”

And thus is the great national sport of the Vosges carried on. Upon the occasional victory over the toothsome wild boar of the forest a triumphant procession follows behind the champion, who strides gallantly through the village street with his trophy hanging head down over his back. If the village is not too densely populated every inhabitant within it dines upon a delicious meat that night.

CHAPTER XVIII

STRAFING THE DRACHEN

Observation balloons, or “Drachen” as the Boches call them, constitute a most valuable method of espionage upon the movements of an enemy and at the same time are a most tempting bait to pilots of the opposing fighting squadrons.

They are huge in size, forming an elongated sausage some two hundred feet in length and perhaps fifty feet in diameter. They hang swinging in the sky at a low elevation—some 2,000 feet or under, and are pre-vented from making any rapid movements of escape from aeroplane attack by reason of the long cable which attaches them to their mother-truck on the highway below.

These trucks which attend the balloons are of the ordinary size—a three-ton motor truck which steers and travels quite like any big lorry one meets on the streets. On the truck-bed is fastened a winch which lets out the cable to any desired length. In case of an attack by shell-fire the truck simply runs up the road a short distance without drawing down the balloon. When it is observed that the enemy gunners have again calculated its range another move is made, perhaps back to a point near its former position.

Large as is its bulk and as favorable and steady a target as it must present to the enemy gunners three miles away, it is seldom indeed that a hit from bursting shrapnel is recorded.

These balloons are placed along the lines some two miles back of the front line trenches. From his elevated perch 2,000 feet above ground, the observer can study the ground and pick up every detail over a radius of ten miles on every side. Clamped over his ears are telephone receivers. With his telescope to his eye he observes and talks to the officers on the truck below him. They in turn inform him of any especial object about which information is desired. If our battery is firing upon a certain enemy position, the observer watches for the dropping of the shells and corrects the faults in aim. If a certain roadway is being dug up by our artillery, the observer notifies the battery when sufficient damage has been done to render that road impassable.

Observation balloons are thus a constant menace to contemplated movements of forces and considered as a factor of warfare they are of immense importance. Every fifteen or twenty miles along the front both
sides station their balloons, and when one chances to be shot down by an enemy aeroplane another immediately runs up to take its place.

Shelling by artillery fire being so ineffective it naturally occurs to every aeroplane pilot that such a huge and unwieldy target must be easy to destroy from the air. Their cost is many times greater than the value of an aeroplane. They cannot fight back with any hope of success. All that seems to be required is a sudden dash by a swift fighting aeroplane, a few shots with flaming bullets—and the big gas-bag burst into flames. What could be more simple?

I had been victorious over five or six enemy aeroplanes at this time and had never received a wound in return. This balloon business puzzled me and I was determined to solve the mystery attending their continued service, in the face of so many hostile aeroplanes flying constantly in their vicinity.

Accordingly, I lay awake many nights pondering over the stories I had heard about attacking these Drachen, planning just how I should dive in and let them have a quick burst, sheer off and climb away from their machine-gun fire, hang about for another dive and continue these tactics until a sure hit could be obtained.

I would talk this plan over with several of my pilots and after working out all the details we would try it on. Perhaps we could make 94 Squadron famous for its destruction of enemy balloons. There must be some way to do it, provided I picked out the right men for the job and gave them a thorough training.

After discussing the matter with Major Atkinson, our Commanding Officer, who readily gave me his approval, I sought out Reed Chambers, Jimmy Meissner, Thorn Taylor and Lieutenant Loomis. These four with myself would make an ideal team to investigate this proposition.

First we obtained photographs of five German balloons in their lairs, from the French Observation Squadron. Then we studied the map and ascertained the precise position each occupied: the nature of the land, the relative position of the mountains and rivers, the trees and villages in the vicinity of each, and all the details of their environment.

One by one we visited these balloons, studying from above the nature of the roadway upon which their mother-trucks must operate, the height of the trees above this roadway and where the anti-aircraft defenses had been posted around each Drachen. These latter were the only perils we had to fear. We knew the reputation of these defenses, and they were not to be ignored. Since they alone were responsible for the defense of the balloons, we very well knew that they were unusually numerous and accurate. They would undoubtedly put up such a thick barrage of bullets around the suspended Drachen that an aeroplane must actually pass through a steady hailstorm of bullets both in coming in and in going out.

Willie Coppens, the Belgian Ace, had made the greatest success of this balloon strafing. He had shot down over a score of German Drachens and had never received a wound. I knew he armed his aeroplane with flaming rockets which penetrated the envelope of the gas-bag and burned there until it was ignited. This method had its advantages and its disadvantages. But another trick that was devised by Coppens met with my full approval.

This was to make the attack early in the morning or late in the evening, when visibility was poor and the approach of the buzzing motor could not be definitely located. Furthermore, he made his attack from a low level, flying so close to the ground that he could not be readily picked up from above. As he approached the vicinity of his balloon he zoomed quickly up and
began his attack. If the balloon was being hauled down he met it half-way. All depended upon the quickness of his attack and the sureness of his aim.

On June 25th, 1918, my alarm-clock buzzed me awake at 2:30 o'clock sharp. As I was the instigator of this little expedition, I leaped out of bed with no reluctant regrets and leaned out of my window to get a glimpse of the sky. It promised to be a fine day!

Rousing out the other four of my party, I telephoned to the hangars and ordered out the machines. The guns had been thoroughly overhauled during the night and straight incendiary bullets had been placed in the magazines. Everything was ready for our first attack and we sat down to a hurried breakfast, full of excitement and fervor.

The whole squadron got up and accompanied us to the hangars. We were soon in our flying suits and strapped in our seats. The motors began humming and then I felt my elation suddenly begin to leak out of me. My motor was stubborn and would not keep up its steady revolutions. Upon investigation, I found one magneto absolutely refused to function, leaving me with but one upon which I could rely! I debated within myself for a few seconds as to whether I should risk dropping into Germany with a dud motor or risk the condolences of the present crowd which had gathered to see us off.

The former won in spite of my best judgment. Rather than endure the sarcasm of the onlookers and the disappointment of my team, I prayed for one more visitation of my Goddess of Luck and gave the signal to start.

At 4:30 o'clock we left the ground and headed straight into Germany. I had decided to fly eight or ten miles behind the lines and then turn and come back at the balloon line from an unexpected quarter, trusting to the systematic discipline of the German army to have its balloons just beginning to ascend as we reached them. Each pilot in my party had his own balloon marked out. Each was to follow the same tactics. We separated as soon as we left the field, each man following the direction of his own course.

Passing high over Nancy I proceeded northward and soon saw the irregular lines of the trenches below me. It was a mild morning and very little activity was discernible on either side. Not a gun was flashing in the twilight which covered the ground and as far as my eye could reach nothing was stirring. It was the precise time of day when weary fighters would prefer to catch their last wink of sleep. I hoped they would be equally deaf to the sounds of my early humming Nieuport.

Cutting off my motor at 15,000 feet over the lines, I prayed once more that when the time came to switch on again my one magneto would prove faithful. It alone stood between me and certain capture. I could not go roaring along over the sleeping heads of the whole German army and expect to preserve my secret. By gliding quietly along with silent engine as I passed deeper and deeper within their territory I could gradually lose my altitude and then turn and gain the balloon line with comparatively little noise.

"Keep your Spunk Up—Magneto, Boy!" I sang to my engine as I began the fateful glide. I had a mental vision of the precise spot behind the enemy balloon where I should turn on my switch and there discover—liberty or death! I would gladly have given my kingdom that moment for just one more little magneto!

At that moment I was passing swiftly over the little village of Goin. It was exactly five o'clock. The black outlines of the Bois de Face lay to my left, nestled along the two arms of the Moselle River. I might possibly reach those woods with a long glide if
my motor failed me at the ultimate moment. I could crash in the treetops, hide in the forest until dark and possibly make my way back through the lines with a little luck. Cheery thoughts I had as I watched the menacing German territory slipping away beneath my wings!

And then I saw my balloon! The faithful fellows had not disappointed me at any rate! Conscientious and reliable men these Germans were! Up and ready for the day’s work at the exact hour I had planned for them! I flattened out my glide a trifle more, so as to pass their post with the minimum noise of singing wires. A mile or two beyond them I began a wide circle with my nose well down. It was a question of seconds now and all would be over. I wondered how Chambers and Meissner and the others were getting on. Probably at this very instant they were jubilating with joy over the scene of a flaming bag of gas!

Finding the earth rapidly nearing me, I viraged sharply to the left and looked ahead. There was my target floating blandly and unsuspicously in the first rays of the sun. The men below were undubitably drinking their coffee and drawing up orders for the day’s work that would never be executed. I headed directly for the swinging target and set my sights dead on its center. There facing me with rare arrogance in the middle of the balloon was a huge Maltese Cross — the emblem of the Boche balloons. I shifted my rudder a bit and pointed my sights exactly at the center of the cross. Then I deliberately pressed both triggers with my right hand, while with my left I snapped on the switch.

There must be some compartment in one’s brain for equalizing the conflicting emotions that crowd simultaneously upon one at such moments as this. I realized instantly that I was saved myself, for the motor picked up with a whole-souled roar the very first instant after I made the contact. With this life-saving realization came the simultaneous impression that my whole morning’s work and anguish were wasted.

I saw three or four streaks of flame flash ahead of me and enter the huge bulk of the balloon ahead. Then the flames abruptly ceased.

Flashing bullets were cutting a living circle all around me too, I noticed. Notwithstanding the subtlety of my stalking approach, the balloon’s defenders had discovered my identity and were all waiting for me. My guns had both jammed. This, too, I realized at the same instant. I had had my chance, had shot my bolt, was in the very midst of a fiery furnace that beggars description and thanks to a benignant providence, was behind a lusty motor that would carry me home.

Amid all these conflicting impressions which surged upon me during that brief instant, I distinctly remember that only one poignant feeling remained in my brain. I had failed in my mission! With the fairest target in the world before my guns, with all the risks already run and conquered, I had failed in my mission merely because of a stupid jamming of my guns.

Automatically I had swerved to the right of the suspended gas-bag and grazed helplessly by the distended sides of the enemy Drachen. I might almost have extended my hand and cut a hole in its sleek envelope, it occurred to me, as I swept by. The wind had been from the east, so I knew that the balloon would stretch away from its supporting cable and leave it to the right. More than one balloon strafier has rushed below his balloon and crashed headlong into the inconspicuous wire cable which anchors it to the ground.

I had planned out every detail with the utmost success. The only thing I had failed in was the expected result. Either the Boche had some material covering
their Drachens that extinguished my flaming bullets, or else the gas which was contained within them was not as highly inflammable as I had been led to believe. Some three or four bullets had entered the sides of the balloon — of this I was certain. Why had they failed to set fire to it?

Later on I was to discover that flaming bullets very frequently puncture observation balloons without producing the expected blaze. The very rapidity of their flight leaves no time for the ignition of the gas. Often in the early dawn the accumulated dew and moisture in the air serve so to dampen the balloon's envelope that hundreds of incendiary bullets penetrate the envelope without doing more damage than can be repaired with a few strips of adhesive plaster.

As I doggedly flew through the fiery curtain of German bullets and set my nose for home I was conscious of a distinct feeling of admiration for the Belgian Willie Coppens. And since he had demonstrated that balloon strafing had in fact a possibility of success, I was determined to investigate this business until I too had solved its mysteries.

Then I began to laugh to myself at an occurrence that until then I had had no time to consider. As I began firing at the sausage, the German observer who had been standing in his basket under the balloon with his eyes glued to his telescope, had evidently been taken entirely by surprise. The first intimation he had of my approach was the bullets which preceded me. At the instant he dropped his telescope he dived headlong over the side of his basket with his parachute. He did not even pause to look around to see what danger threatened him.

Evidently the mother-truck began winding up the cable at the same time, for as the observer jumped for his life the balloon began to descend upon him. I caught the merest glimpse of his face as I swept past him, and there was a mingled look of terror and surprise upon his features that almost compensated me for my disappointment.

On my way homeward I flew directly towards a French observation balloon that swung on the end of its cable in my path. Without considering the consequences of my act, I sheered in and passed quite close to the Frenchman who was staring at me from his suspended basket.

Suddenly the Froggy leaped headlong from his perch and clutching his parachute rope with his two hands began a rapid descent to earth. And not until then did I realize that coming directly at him, head on from Germany as I did, he had no way of reading my cocrats which were painted underneath my wings. He had decided that I was a Boche and did not care to take any chances at a jump with a blazing gas-bag about his ears.

Fortunately for me, the French gunners below could read my bright insignias from the ground and they suffered me to pass, without taking any revenge for the trick I had played upon their comrade.

Arriving at the aerodrome at five-forty-five, I found that I was the last of my little party of balloon strafers to land. The other four were standing together, looking rather sheepishly in my direction as I walked towards them.

"Well, what luck?" I enquired as I came up to them. Nobody spoke. "I thought I saw a big blaze over in your direction. Jimmy!" I went on, addressing myself to Lieutenant Meissner. "Did you get him?"

"No!" replied Jimmy disgustedly. "The balloon was not up in the air at all. I didn't get a sight of it. I didn't even see where they had hidden it."

"Did you get yours, Reed?" I asked, turning to Chambers.

"H——, no!" retorted Lieutenant Chambers em-
phatically. "I shot the thing full of holes, but she wouldn't drop."

The other two pilots had much the same stories. One had failed to find his balloon and the other had made an attack but it had brought no results. All had been subjected to a defensive fire that had quite reversed their opinions of the Archibald family.

"I suppose you burned yours all right, Rick?" said Reed Chambers rather enviously as we walked up to the mess together. "What do you think of us fellows anyway?"

"I think, Reed," replied I, "that we are the rottenest lot of balloonical fakers that ever got up at two-thirty in the morning. But I am happy to discover," I added, thinking of my one puny magneto, "that none of us had to land in Germany."

CHAPTER XIX

THE CHÂTEAU-THIERRY SALIENT

The scene of 94 Squadron's operation now changes from the Toul sector to the Château-Thierry region. On June 27th, 1918, all four of our American Fighting Squadrons were ordered to Château-Thierry. We were now four in number, for Squadron 27, commanded by Major Harold E. Hartney, and Squadron 147, commanded by Major Bonnell, had recently completed training and had moved in alongside 95 Squadron and our little Hat-in-the-Ring Squadron.

Toul is a city of some 20,000 inhabitants and would be quite the metropolis of its region, were it not for the larger city of Nancy which lies but fifteen miles east. It has certain quaint and interesting aspects, including a well preserved and ancient moat and ba-

tlements which surround the old city, a picturesque plaza in the center of the town, and several venerable old buildings dating well back into ancient history. Moreover, Toul had shops and busy streets where over-tired aviators could stroll about and make purchases and gaze upon the shifting crowds.

Our new surroundings were of rather a different character. We settled upon an old French aerodrome at Touquin, a small and miserable village some twenty-five miles south of Château-Thierry and the Marne River. The aerodrome was large and smooth and abundantly equipped with the famous French hangars which consist of steel girders with walls and roofs of canvas. They were very spacious, quite cool in summer and camouflaged admirably with the surrounding scenery.

But no provision had been made at Touquin for the pilots and officers.

All of our aeroplanes flew from Toul to Touquin, while the rest of the aerodrome impedimenta was carted rapidly away to the new quarters in lorries, trucks and trailers. The pilots of Squadrons 27 and 147 were rather new at that time; and it was thought wise to assign some of the older pilots of 94 and 95 Squadrons to the task of leading them through the air to the new field.

I was assigned to fly Major Atkinson's Nieuport and was directed to bring up the rear of the aerial procession so as to keep an eye upon those who might fall by the wayside. I found that I had more than I could handle on that occasion.

Lieutenant Buford of 95 Squadron had a reputation of scorning the use of a map in flying over France. He had been selected to lead the pilots of 27 Squadron to Touquin on that morning. I saw him leave the ground with his twenty-odd machines and disappear in the distance. When I arrived at Touquin I learned
down for the night. I passed the spot twice before I could make out the outline of the sleek gas-bag from my low height of only 200 feet above ground. Then taking a fresh start I made two attacks at it in its nest before I succeeded in setting it afire. It finally caught with sufficient glow to light up the whole countryside around, including several machine-gun pits and Archy batteries which I discovered were frantically firing at me. Their aim was bad, however, and I flew safely back to the hangars and landed to receive the information that the result of my patrol had been witnessed by our balloon posts south of Dun and confirmation already had been telephoned in.

It was my sixteenth official victory.

CHAPTER XXXII
A REGULAR DOG-FIGHT

On the afternoon of October 10th the 94th Squadron received orders to destroy two very bothersome enemy balloons, one of which was located at Dun-sur-Meuse, the other at Aincreville. The time for this attack was fixed for us at 3:50 P.M. sharp. A formation of defending planes from 147 Squadron was directed to cover our left wing while a similar formation from the 27th was given the same position on our right. I was placed in command of the expedition and was to arrange all minor details.

Selecting Lieutenants Coolidge and Chambers to act as the balloon executioners, I sent orders to all the pilots who were to accompany our secret raid to assemble their formation at 3,000 feet above Montfaucon at 3:40 o'clock precisely. Then with Coolidge and Chambers ahead of us, the united force would proceed first to the Dun balloon, where we would project the two Strafers against Hun aeroplanes while they went in to attack their objective. Then, after destroying the first, if circumstances permitted, we should proceed on to Aincreville, destroy that balloon and beat a retreat straight for home. If Coolidge and Chambers encountered any hostile aircraft they were instructed to avoid fighting, but retire immediately to the protection of our formation.

A clear afternoon made it certain that the Boche machines would be thick about us. According to our Secret Intelligence Reports the enemy had here concentrated the heaviest air force against the Americans that had ever been gathered together since the war began. Both the Richthofen Circus and the Loeser Circus were now opposed to us and we had almost daily seen the well-known red noses of the one and the yellow-bellied fusilages of the other. Also we had distinguished the Checker-Board design of the No. 3 Jagstaffel and the new scout machines which the Huns had but lately sent to the front — the Siemens-Schuckard, which was driven by a four-bladed propeller and which had a much faster climb than had the Spad. Further reports which came to us stated that the new Fokkers now arriving at the front had four instead of two guns mounted forward, two as of yore fastened along the engine top and two others attached to the top wing. Personally I have never seen one of these "Roman Candle" affairs which so startled several pilots who reported having fights with them. They may have been in use along our front, of course, but I have never met one nor seen a pilot who was certain that he had met one. It was said that when all four guns began firing their tracer bullets at an enemy machine, the exhibition resembled the setting off of Fourth of July Roman Candles, so continuous a stream of tracer bullets issued from the nozzles of the four machine-guns.
This heavy consolidation of enemy aircraft along our front was necessary to the Germans for two reasons. The retreating Hun infantry must hold the Meuse front until they had time to withdraw their troops from Belgium and the north or the latter would be cut off; secondly, the allied bombing squadrons which were now terrifying the Rhine towns were all located along this front and must be prevented from destroying those Prussian cities so dear to the heart of the Hun. General Trenchard of the British Independent Air Force proved he was right when he demonstrated that his bombing of enemy cities would necessarily withdraw from the battle front much of the enemy's air strength to defend those helpless cities against such attacks.

So it is not necessarily to be believed that Germany was actually in such fright over the appearance of the American airmen that she straightway sent all her best aviators to the Verdun region to oppose us. She really had quite other objects in view. But such a move nevertheless resulted in filling the skies opposite us with the best fighting airmen in the German service. It promised to be a busy month for us.

Fourteen of my Spads then left the ground on October 10th at 3.30 in the afternoon, with eight of 147's machines and seven of those from 27 Squadron taking their places on the right and left of us as arranged. I pushed my Spad No. 1 up several thousand feet above the flotilla to watch their progress over the lines from a superior altitude. The enormous formation below me resembled a huge crawling beetle, Coolidge and Chambers flying in exact position ahead of them to form the stingers. Thus arranged we proceeded swiftly northwest in the direction of Dun-sur-Meuse.

We arrived over the lines to be welcomed by an outlandish exhibition of Archy's fury, but despite the
large target we made no damage was received and none of our Spads turned back. Reaching a quieter region inside German territory I looked about me. There indeed was our Dun balloon floating tranquilly in the sunshine. It was 3.40 by my watch. We had ten minutes to maneuver for position and reach our objective. I looked down at my convoy and found that 147’s Formation at the left had separated themselves somewhat widely from the others. Then studying the distant horizon I detected a number of specks in the sky, which soon resolved themselves into a group of eleven Fokkers flying in beautiful formation and evidently just risen from their aerodrome at Stenay, a dozen miles beyond Dun. They were approaching from the west and must have reached the detached formation of 147’s pilots before the rest of my flight could reach them, unless they immediately closed up. I dived down to dip them a signal.

On my way down I glanced around me and saw approaching us from Metz in quite the opposite direction another formation of eight Fokkers. Certainly the Huns had wonderful methods of information which enabled them to bring to a threatened point this speedy relief. While I debated an instant as to which danger was the most pressing I looked below and discovered that the enemy balloon men were already engaged in pulling down their observation balloon, which was the object of our attack back of Dun-sur-Meuse. So they suspected the purpose of our little expedition! It lacked yet a minute or two of the time set for our dash at the balloon and as I viewed the situation it would not be wise for Coolidge and Chambers to take their departure from our formation until we had disposed of the advancing Fokkers from the west. Accordingly I kept my altitude and set my machine towards the rear of the Stenay Fokkers, which I immediately observed wore the red noses of the von

Richthofen Circus. They were heading in at the 147 Formation which was still separated almost a mile away from our other Spads. Lieutenant Wilbur White of New York was leading No. 147’s pilots. He would have to bear the brunt of the Fokker attack.

Evidently the Fokker leader scorned to take notice of me, as his scouts passed under me and plunged ahead towards White’s formation. I let them pass, dipped over sharply and with accumulated speed bore down upon the tail of the last man in the Fokker formation. It was an easy shot and I could not have missed. I was agreeably surprised, however, to see that my first shots had set fire to the Hun’s fuel tank and that the machine was doomed. I was almost equally gratified the next second to see the German pilot level off his blazing machine and with a sudden leap overboard into space let the Fokker slide safely away without him. Attached to his back and sides was a rope which immediately pulled a dainty parachute from the bottom of his seat. The umbrella opened within a fifty foot drop and settled him gradually to earth within his own lines.

I was sorry I had no time to watch his spectacular descent. I truly wished him all the luck in the world. It is not a pleasure to see a burning aeroplane descending to earth bearing with it a human being who is being tortured to death. Not unmixed with my relief in witnessing his safe jump was the wonder as to why the Huns had all these humane contrivances and why our own country could not at least copy them to save American pilots from being burned to a crisp!

I turned from this extraordinary spectacle in mid-air to witness another which in all my life at the front I have never seen equaled in horror and awfulness. The picture of it has haunted my dreams during many nights since.

Upon seeing that my man was hit I had immediately
turned up to retain my superiority in height over the other Huns. Now as I came about and saw the German pilot leap overboard with his parachute I saw that a general fight was on between the remaining ten Fokkers and the eight Spads of 142 Squadron. The Fokker leader had taken on the rear Spad in White’s Formation when White turned and saw him coming. Like a flash White zoomed up into a half turn, executed a reversion and came back at the Hun leader to protect his pilot from a certain death. White was one of the finest pilots and best air fighters in our group. He had won seven victories in combat. His pilots loved him and considered him a great leader, which he most assuredly was. White’s maneuver occupied but an instant. He came out of his swoop and made a direct plunge for the enemy machine, which was just getting in line on the rear Spad’s tail. Without firing a shot the heroic White rammed the Fokker head on while the two machines were approaching each other at the rate of 250 miles per hour!

It was a horrible yet thrilling sight. The two machines actually telescoped each other, so violent was the impact. Wings went through wings and at first glance both the Fokker and Spad seemed to disintegrate. Fragments filled the air for a moment, then the two broken fusilages, bound together by the terrific collision fell swiftly down and landed in one heap on the bank of the Meuse!

For sheer nerve and bravery I believe this heroic feat was never surpassed. No national honor too great could compensate the family of Lieutenant White for this sacrifice for his comrade pilot and his unparalleled example of heroism to his Squadron. For the most pitiable feature of Lieutenant White’s self-sacrifice was the fact that this was his last flight over the lines before he was to leave for the United States on a visit to his wife and two small children.

Not many pilots enter the service with loved ones so close to them!

This extraordinary disaster ended the day’s fighting for the Hun airmen. No doubt they valued their own leader as much as we did Lieutenant White, or perhaps they got a severe attack of “wind-up” at witnessing the new method of American attack. At any rate they withdrew and we immediately turned our attention to the fight which was now in progress between the Spads of 27 Squadron at our right and the Hun formation from Metz. It looked like a famous dog-fight.

As I came about and headed for the mixup I glanced below me at Dun and was amazed to see one of our Spads piquing upon the nested balloon through a hurricane of flaming projectiles. A “flaming onion” had pierced his wings and they were now ablaze. To add to his predicament, a Hun machine was behind his tail, firing as he dived. I diverted my course and started down to his rescue, but it was too late. The fire in his wings was fanned by the wind and made such progress that he was compelled to land in German territory, not far from the site of the balloon. In the meantime other things were happening so rapidly that I had little opportunity to look about me. For even as I started down to help this balloon strafier I saw another Spad passing me with two Fokkers on his tail, filling his fuselage with tracer bullets as the procession went by. A first glance had identified the occupant of the Spad as my old protégé — the famous Jimmy Meissner! For the third time since we had been flying together Providence had sent me along just in the nick of time to get Jimmy out of trouble. Twice before on the old Nieuports Jimmy had torn off his wings in too sudden a flip and his unscrupulous antagonists had been about to murder him as he wobbled along, when I happened by. Now, after a four
months’ interlude Jimmy comes sailing by again, smiling and good-natured as ever, with two ugly brutes on his tail trying their best to execute him.

I quickly tacked onto the procession, settling my sights into the rear machine and letting go a long burst as I came within range. The Hun fell off and dropped down out of control, the other Fokker immediately pulling away and diving steeply for home and safety.

Two other Fokkers fell in that dog-fight, neither of which I happened to see. Both Coolidge and Chambers, though they had been cheated of their balloon, brought down a Fokker apiece, which victories were later confirmed. The Spad which had dropped down into German hands after being set afire by the flaming onions belonged to Lieutenant Brotheron, like White and Meissner, a member of the 147th Squadron.

Four more victories were thus added to 94’s score by this afternoon’s work. We did not get the balloons but we had done the best we could. I was never in favor of attacking observation balloons in full daylight and this day’s experience—the aroused suspicions of the observers, the pulling down of the balloon as strong aeroplane assistance at the same time arrived, and the fate of Lieutenant Brotheron, who tried unsuccessfully to pass through the defensive barrage—is a fair illustration, I believe, of the difficulties attending such daylight strafings. Just at dawn or just at dusk is the ideal time for surprising the Drachen.

Our captured Hanover machine, it will be recalled, had been brought back to our aerodrome and by now was in good condition to fly. We left the Hun Maltese Cross and all their markings exactly as we found them and after telephoning about to the various American aerodromes in our vicinity that they must not practise target shooting at a certain Hanover aero-

plane that they might encounter while wandering over our part of the country, we took the machine up to see how it flew. The Hanover was a staunch heavy craft and had a speed of about one hundred miles an hour when two men (a pilot and an observer) were carried. She handled well and was able to slow down to a very comfortable speed at landing. Many of us took her up for a short flip and landed again without accident.

Then it became a popular custom to let some pilot get aloft in her and as he began to clear the ground half a dozen of us in Spads would rise after him and practise piquing down as if in an attack. The Hanover pilot would twist and turn and endeavor to do his best to outmaneuver the encircling Spads. Of course, the lighter flying machines always had the best of these mock battles, but the experience was good for all of us, both in estimating the extent of the maneuverability of the enemy two-seaters and in the testing of our relative speeds and climbing.

While engaged in one of these mock combats over our field one afternoon we came down to find Captain Cooper, the official Movie Picture expert, standing below watching us. He had his camera with him and had been attempting to grind out some movie films while we were flying overhead. He spent the night with us and after some planning of the scenario we decided to take him up in the rear seat of a Liberty aeroplane and let him catch with his camera a real movie of an aeroplane combat in mid-air. All the details carefully arranged, we gathered next morning on the field, put him in the rear seat of the Liberty and helped him strap in his camera so that the pressure of the wind would not carry it overboard. Jimmy Meissner was to be his pilot. Jimmy climbed in the front seat, warmed up his motor and when everything was ready and we other “actors” were sitting in our seats waiting for him to get away. Jimmy gave the
signal, opened up his motor and began to taxi over the grass. Several hundred feet down the field he turned back, facing the wind, which was blowing from the west. Here he prepared for his real take-off. His machine rushed along with ever quickening speed until the tail lifted, the wheels next skimmed the ground and the Liberty rose gradually into the air. Just as they approached the road which skirts the west side of the aerodrome, the Liberty's engine stopped. A line of wires ran along the roadside some fifteen feet above ground. Jimmy saw them and attempted to zoom over them — but in vain. The Liberty crashed full in the middle of the highway, bounded up a dozen feet and after a half somersault, stuck her nose in the ground the other side of the road and came to a rest.

We hurried over, expecting to find the occupants badly injured, as the Liberty herself appeared to be a total wreck. But out stepped Jimmy and Captain Cooper, neither of them the worse for their experience. And to complete our surprise, the camera, although covered with the debris of the machine, was quite unhurt!

That ended our little movie show for this day. We had no other two-seater machine on hand. But we were delighted to find that Captain Cooper, in spite of his narrow escape, was quite determined to go through with the show. So we went to the Supply Station for another machine and again put the Captain up for the night while awaiting its coming.

Next day, October 19th, I was directed to appear before General Patrick at Souilly to receive the American decoration, the Distinguished Service Cross, with four oak leaves. These oak leaves represent the number of citations in Army Orders that the wearer of a decoration has received.

The usual formalities, which I have already described, attended the ceremony. Over twenty pilots of the American Air Service were presented with the D. S. C. by General Patrick, after which the military band played the National Anthem while we all stood at attention.

I could not help thinking of the absent pilots whose names were being read out but who did not answer, and for whom decorations were waiting for deeds of heroism that had ended with their death. There was White, for whom the whole Group mourned. What a puny recognition was a simple ribbon for heroism such as his! There was Luke — the most intrepid air-fighter that ever sat in an aeroplane. What possible honor could be given him by his country that would accord him the distinction he deserved!

One thing was certain. The reputation of these great American airmen would live as long as the comrades who knew them survived. Perhaps none of us would ever live to see our homeland again. I glanced down the line of honor men who were standing immobile in their tracks, listening to the last notes of "The Star Spangled Banner"! Who will be the next to go, I wondered, knowing only too well that with every fresh honor that was conferred came a corresponding degree of responsibility and obligation to continue to serve comrade and country so long as life endured.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AN AEROPLANE MOVIE SHOW

THE new Liberty duly arrived and after a brief rehearsal of our parts in the coming show we again had our machines run out on the field on the morning of October 21st and took our stations in the line. Captain Cooper was again placed in the rear seat of the Liberty, with Jimmy Meissner in the front