

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, MARCH 5, 1916.—Copyright, 1916, by the Sun Printing and Publishing Association.

## FIGHTING FOR FRANCE IN THE AIR

The incidents related here are from the experiences of an American pilot of the Allies' air service on the western front, in the Balkans and Turkey. He has received medals of the first rank for gallantry and efficiency in airmanship. The stories present a romantic side of the great war drama which has not hitherto been described by any one so well qualified to tell it. For military reasons the narrator of these war adventures in the air cannot use his name in connection therewith.

### Thrilling Experiences in Raids and Aerial Duels of a Young American Aeroplane Pilot in the Service of the Allies

It was at Maubeuge that I got my baptism of gunfire. I was piloting a machine with an observer as companion. We ran into dense clouds, so had to turn back. As we were coming over the French lines I saw a movement and bustle among the troops and then there was the noise of about a thousand rifles cracking at us. The infantry had mistaken me for a German because my machine was different from most of the others!

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My first sensations were of surprise, which rapidly developed into a kind of fear, which in turn changed to fascination. It positively fascinated me to see the holes appearing in the planes as each bullet ripped its way through, although only a few of them pierced the wings. I was looking at my instrument board to see at what height I was when suddenly a bullet hit the board and a splinter jumped up in front of me. At about the same time a bullet pierced the gasoline tank and all the precious liquid ran out. Another one hit one of the instruments and smashed it. When the gasoline ran out there was nothing for it but to come down, so I trusted to luck and came down in the first good field I saw.

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Good fortune was with me in that episode, for it is oftentimes possible for such holes to be reinf in the wings by bullets and shells that it is absolutely necessary to make as quick a landing as possible. It had not been my fate up to the present time—and I am writing this with one hand on wood—to make a descent under such conditions, but a very dear friend of mine who has since "gone west" had the misfortune.

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Suddenly the pilot shut off the motor, and nothing was audible except the whistling of the wind through the wires. He turned to me and pointed out some little puffs of smoke far below. He signed to me to listen, but I could hear nothing except the sound of the wind. Then the motor was started again and its steady roar covered everything.

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A German aeroplane captured by the French near Calais.

Machine gun used for shooting down aeroplanes.

A French biplane taking on board an aerial torpedo.

Photos by Medem Photo Service.

mander of the Zeppelin from being overtaken by the enemy. The machine which I was piloting was the second to raise above the fire zone, though one rugged wing showed a wound of the fray.

As a balloon the Zeppelin could rise no higher, for all her ballast had been sacrificed. The captain decided to bring his elevating planes back to normal and stake all on a high speed flight in a horizontal course. He was encouraged in this by the sight of his German lines below, with the landmarks which he knew so well. Puffs of smoke told him that the aeroplanes were being shelled by German gunners, that the bombardment showered upon us might relieve him at any moment. Indeed some of the shots burst so near the Zeppelin that the commander must have had an indifferent opinion of the gunners' marksmanship.

But the firing on land soon ceased. An ominous sign to the commander of the Zeppelin. When I talked afterward with a comrade in a machine below the level of the Zeppelin, he told me of the intense agony which the Zeppelin crew suffered as they looked at each other with horror-stricken eyes. Without doubt their one possessing thought was, "What is happening above us?" From their little cabins there was no possibility of an upward survey, for the great body of the ship loomed above them, shutting out the overhead view.

But the crew of the Zeppelin could picture in their minds' eyes those two kilted birds, of which I happened to be plotting one, flying after them remorselessly as Fate, and inch by inch gaining on them. Well did the crew know that the Zeppelin would soon be beneath the aeroplanes. A bomb will drop on the great ship's back, and then—

In a frenzy the captain plunged his ship downward and swung her to the right with a swerve that threatened to break her spine. But the elephantine manoeuvre availed him little. We in the aeroplanes could dive and swoop with the grace of swallows, while the giant ship lumbered like a derelict balloon.

But what was passing through the mind of the commander of that Zeppelin? Fall within his view down there on land was his harbor of safety, his hangar, only several thousand feet away. His fate was in the balance and he knew it. His transit to land would be only a matter of seconds, but what of those sizzling aeroplanes above him? In the fierce conflict of the air in Europe there is no quarter. True, it is a more man to man combat than any other phase of the war, but it is relentless.

We of the aeroplanes summoned up all our remaining nerve energy. Our prize was just within our grasp; he must not escape. If he did we would most easily become the prey of the anti-aircraft guns that were waiting their chance to send aloft their deadly hail of shrapnel.

Down swept our bombs with unerring accuracy. There was a dull thud and then a sheet of flame, spreading with lightning speed, in a moment enveloping the entire massive vessel. The burning hydrogen consumed it with appalling fury, and in a few instants the great ship, crumbling and melting, hurtled to earth like a blazing meteor.

From the earth many guns spoke. They but served for the firing salute over the graves of the fallen.

Our machines rocked under the concussion of bursting shells, but we managed to keep on our way.

Only a German knew what it is to see a Zeppelin fall. It is a moment of doom.

What a tremendous impression that first aerial encounter with a Zeppelin left upon my mind! And while I tried to do my bit in the encounter I was that it was not my bomb that had struck the backbone of the monster airship.

The Zeppelins have had their day, which I believe is fast passing. Of all the combats at the outbreak of hostilities the Germans alone possessed an effective aerial weapon of offence in their Zeppelins, their time of superiority in this respect is fast going away, and the wonder is that the Germans hitherto have not made better use of their opportunities in this respect, for the damage they have wrought has been from a military point of view totally insignificant.

There are two means of defence against the Zeppelin which have received attention. The first is the anti-aircraft gun, enormously improved in vertical range and accuracy of fire since the beginning of the war, but still a poor and uncertain weapon at the best. The second method consists

of offence, for the Zeppelin is more especially vulnerable, not in the air, but in its air, and soon there will scarcely be a German airship base designed for depredations on England and on the North Sea which will be out of range of the British long distance aeroplanes.

In the spring, in fleet formation, these long distance aeroplanes will make offensive raids on the Zeppelin bases. In these bombardments of the air, substantially the same tactics will be used as was formerly used in naval warfare. There are three armaments of the aerial service, each utilizing separate types of machines. The first class comprises the scouting craft, light and heavy, according as the work is on a wide strategical or a limited tactical scale. Secondly, there are the aeroplanes which furnish the eyes for the artillery, fairly heavy machines with machine guns for beating off the attacks of hostile flyers. Finally, there are the squadrons, termed by the French "groupe de bombardement," utilized wholly for offensive purposes, both against enemy air craft, for bomb dropping, and for firing on enemy forces behind the battle line.

And this is the formation in which they will strike forth in their spring campaign—the mighty Armada of the air.

With such fleets in the air there will be aerial battles which even Jules Verne and Wells could not have dreamed of.

Some of my own experiences in aerial combat, when I crashed a dozen fold, will give the reader an idea of the coming air encounters.

I had just passed over the woods of the German front line, which were bristling with "Archie" and which fired me a worthy salute when a biplane and monoplane appeared, east of me, the biplane sailing with ample evidence of being in a hurry, and the monoplane overhauling it hands over fist. We were about 2,500 feet above the "trenches" and when within about a mile I got a glimpse of the monoplane's front wing. Black cross on a white base. Good enough!

Down went the nose of my machine almost vertically, 2,000 feet I came down, while the air speed indicator went up to the 100 mile per hour point and then stuck, not having been designed for the purpose of exceeding recognized limits. I expected the little biplane I was piloting to fold up any minute, but she stood it like a rock.

In a few moments the other machines were almost vertically below me. The German had caught the biplane and was emptying his gun into it at fifty yards range. It subsequently transpired that just at this time he had three bullets through the observer's arm and one through the gasoline tank, with the result that the previous thing was pouring all over the pilot, observer and fuselage.

I started pulling my machine out of her nose dive at 2,000 feet above the German. I don't believe the pilot ever saw me until I opened fire. Twenty pounds of lead I planted into the rear of his machine, though I gave no attention to me, turning on a perpendicular bank and doing a complete circuit to see where he intended going to.

The little biplane was describing circuits around me, while I did a sort of inner circle, conducted of course with a perpendicular bank, coming to the fact that my speed was so great and that I was doing complete turns in about twice the length of my machine, the centrifugal force was so great that the machine gun could not be held on its mounting and could not be pulled up square. Things being at that moment distinctly unadvisable, I don't sorry to see the German head for home.

Hot in pursuit I went. I was getting a little anxious about the "Archie" for I was gradually decreasing my altitude. But a lucky shot found its billet and the pilot was no more.

The result of this machine, with no pilot described when falling from 7,000 feet were extraordinary, viewed from above. First wheels up, then right way again, a loop several circles, a nose dive, more loops and several turns onto and off the back, sideways, until it was lost to sight almost on the ground.

About a week later I was flying over the same territory at a low altitude. I was attracted by something I saw on the ground and descending I discovered a small, hastily reared mound topped by a rough cross, and on the cross had been written as legibly as was possible with a pencil.

"THOU HAST AN ARMAY."

That was all. Not far away there lay the fragments of the aeroplane. It gave me a moment's pause.

The second article in this series will appear next Sunday.