

RAOUL LUFBERY'S LAST TALE IS TOLD

American "Ace of Aces" Meets Terrible But Glorious Death Soon After Writing Story.

DIJON AIRPLANE GRAVEYARD

Aviation Camp at Toul Reached and French Flyers Immediately Proceeded to Initiation of Newcomers by Night Alarm of Raid.

BY RAOUL LUFBERY.

The American "Ace of Aces" Farwell Article, Finished the Night Before He Died. Copyright 1918, by the McClure Newspaper Syndicate.

A week passed at the center of aviation at Dijon without my having to exert any talents as a sailmaker. The battle of the Marne was at hand, but the greater portion of my working time was spent as "pilote des caisses d'essence," an aviation term applied to unloading the auto trucks bringing in the 50-liter cases of aeroplane gasoline and carrying them to the storeroom on one's back. This was not a very interesting occupation, but it had to be done. Moreover, it was useless to object, the military regulations requiring that one perform the duties assigned to him without any dispute. To those who complain they invariably reply with a shrug of the shoulders and a "Qu'est-ce que vous voulez? C'est la guerre!" My only consolation was in finding that my friend, Captain James N. Hall, who was with me the other day when he was shot down and captured. He was not a very good academic pilot. He, also, struggled at "pilote des caisses d'essence," but lacked the inclination and the training for the kind of work, and I do not think that I made a mistake when I said that he would never be an expert in that line.

After the day's work was finished we invariably spent the evening in the barracks, reading the papers and discussing the news of the day. At that time was very discouraging.

"It's going bad. It's going very bad!" said one. "The Boches continue their march toward Paris. It appears that they're not very far from now."

Pessimism is rampant. To which another replied: "But, old top, don't you see, that's the idea. We let them advance in order to beat them at the latest date. My cousin works in the ministry."

Then the shrill, rasping voice of our pessimist broke out. "You're all of you way behind the times. Don't let anyone pull the wool over your eyes like that. Can't you see that we've been betrayed; sold out to the Boche as we were in 1870? What a joke, you think of it?"

"What do I think of it?" I replied, reflectively. "Well, I think that although we have lost the first battle, we still have enough time to win another."

This reply, almost heroic, did not please my interlocutor. He, too, he shouted in a voice louder than before: "Hey, there! You guys; look at the Yank who is trying to put something over on us. That's all been hashed over long ago. General Desaix made that same little clap-trap speech years before you and me, and you, you'll never be one, or I miss my guess."

I was going to answer when suddenly "taps" were sounded, putting an end to the discussion, and we all went to bed.

Aeroplane Graveyard Described.

The center of aviation at Dijon, like all large centers which were up to date, had its cemetery; except that this one did not exist, as one might be led to believe, to serve as the last resting place for the remains of the pilots and mechanics of the camp. No, indeed! It was simply a place where the wrecks, or rather, a very bizarre dumpheap, where rested in common the remains of aeroplanes of all types and all makes.

This graveyard made a lasting impression upon my memory. Often, during a few leisure moments, I would stroll over there and rest my elbows upon the top rail of the fence that separated these derelicts from the outer world. I would think how much like human beings were these discarded machines. Only a few months ago they had been alive, although it was only a mechanical life and had been able to defy the laws of gravity and soar with the birds. And now—they were in the discard, left to rot and ruin, not worth the space they occupied.

The flat surfaces of the wings were covered with dust; the fabric had been torn in thousands of places and here and there pieces dangled by mere threads, swaying in the breeze; the cables and staywires especially appeared to be in a state of looking for a home, and in many cases were veritable panels of cobwebs; and occasionally there was to be seen a motor, rusty enough to have been at the bottom of the ocean for a dozen years.

Many Planes Unrecognizable.

In looking over this ghastly and motley collection of derelicts, I had much the same feeling that I imagined the good people who first saw old Rip Van Winkle must have had when he burst upon them after his 30 years of sleep. I could distinguish many of the different types, while others were smashed and wrecked beyond all recognition. Just before me lay a Bleriot that had been through a bad wing slip. The right wing was broken off close at the fuselage and its tip crumpled and torn, much as one would up a newspaper before throwing it into the fire.

In one corner I could make out an old Breguet that had experienced a "pancake" or loss of speed from a height of about 30 feet. Its landing gear had been pushed away up between the wings. Among its mechanics, this type of machine was familiarly called "McCormick" because when in the air the sound of its motor could be very easily mistaken for the thrashing machine at work in the adjoining field.

Ancient Farman "Cage Poule."

Near the entrance lay an ancient Farman, type 1513, with the elevating planes sticking away out in front. In loving terms we always spoke of this type apparatus as a "cage poule" because, with its many struts from interlaced staywires, it did greatly resemble the fenced-in yard where the better portion of our ham and eggs originate. Also this pet name, at times rather got under the skin of the pilots riding these buses.

Occupying a prominent place in the center of this sacred plot, drooped one over another, were several Morane-Parasol. One in particular I recognized. Its nose was smashed in, its tail gone, and the fuselage broken off square, just back of the pilot's seat. Only a few days previous the pilot had

lost control of this machine and rammed into the ground, heading first; one of the worst smashes I have ever seen. It made me shiver to look at it. Frequently my reveries were disturbed by the arrival of a new victim. Then I would jump over the fence, examine it carefully, trying to ascertain, if possible, the cause of its downfall, and later discussing the accident with my comrades.

The day following my dispute with the pessimist, I was assigned with my friend, the academical, to carry the tail of a smashed Bleriot to its lair. A corporal, a double-seater, commanded the detail, that is to say, he was the "master of ceremonies."

"Harc Pource Reappears." "Hey, corporal! Director of the work, you think that a little march from Chopin would be appropriate on this occasion?"

The corporal, good boy that he was, found the idea very amusing and set the example himself, by striking up the opening strains in his deep bass voice.

Being unable to sing, or at the most singing very badly, I contented myself by being the chief mourner. But this did not add to the harmony. My walling resembled more the yelping of a dog when you step on his tail.

The funeral procession was slowly approaching the cemetery, when suddenly a young man rose above our hubbub. I heard someone calling, "Lufbery! Lufbery!" I turned around and saw a figure coming towards us gesturing wildly. Looking again, I recognized Marc Pource.

"Well, Luf, old man! How's everything? He said, shaking hands. 'You certainly have been interesting in your work; here I've been hollering at you for more than five minutes, and you never even turned your head.'"

Preparations for Flight Made. "Qu'est-ce que vous voulez?" I replied, shrugging my shoulders. "C'est la guerre!"

"And now you're going to fight in a slightly different fashion, for I'm taking you to the front with me! We leave tomorrow, in my double-seater, Morane-Parasol, to join the Escadrille M. S. at Toul. I have seen the commanding officer of the camp, asked for you and everything is arranged. Nothing more for you to do but to pack. Does that suit you?"

"Hip! Hip! Hooray!" I rousingly replied.

The next day I was ready long before the hour of departure. Very carefully I had packed my equipment in all the spare corners of the fuselage. There was a blanket; a haversack, very fat and bulging, holding my mess kit, toilet articles, etc.; a bag of tools, and lastly, a "fusil Gras," a relic of the days of 1870, with which I proposed to bring down the first Boche who would be unfortunate enough to cross our path.

The visibility was good, the clouds were high and the wind favorable. "We must take advantage of these excellent conditions," remarked Marc Pource, upon approaching his machine, and got under way. Bundle in hand, because it's a long trip and you know how cold it is up high. You haven't forgotten the least little thing?"

Then, glancing towards the rear seat, he saw my baggage. "Well! Well!" he exclaimed, "you certainly have a nerve. What's all this junky gear for? A fusil Gras? Why not a tante quinze? But no, this time I object. Do you take my Morane for a wheelbarrow? If we're able to leave the ground with all this junky gear, we'll certainly be fortunate, and our lucky star, which has always favored me, will still be here, watching over us, keeping us in the right path, and from all harm." And more of the same.

Voyage of Toul Eventful. Nevertheless, a little later, the Morane-Parasol, in spite of its overloaded, driven by its pilot, defended by its mechanic, majestically took the air and headed northwest, leaving far behind a checkerboard of towns and green fields, interlaced here and there by the smooth, hard-packed roads, standing out in the sunset like silvery ribbons.

That evening towards 5 o'clock, after an uneventful voyage, we landed on the aviation field near Toul. There we found a few friends who had known before the war; among them the aviators Gilbert and Garros, who also belonged to this famous "Escadrille de reconnaissance M. S. 22," commanded by Captain de Vergnette.

Being as yet unaccustomed to long aerial trips, I admitted frankly that I was rather tired, and I was more than pleased to find, in the mechanics' dormitory, an unoccupied bed with several blankets. Arranging things as comfortably as possible, I was preparing to enjoy a well-earned rest, when suddenly in the next room, separated from ours by only a wooden partition, I heard some voices and soon recognized that of Garros.

"My Captain," he said, "I declare openly that it's getting to be terrible. Again, I was almost brought down by French bullets! And this time it wasn't my own error, but the fault of the tank and just grazed the motor. Don't you think that this is ridiculous? It would be much preferable if they did not shoot at all. This time, there was absolutely no excuse; I was flying low enough for them to see my cocarde, if they took the trouble to look at it."

"Yes," responded the Captain, "this is happening too frequently. We must look for a remedy. But it is not altogether the fault of the Boches; at us, they mean all right. I think that, above all, the newspapers are responsible for these disagreeable mistakes. Look here! Not later than last Monday I read an article which said that all aeroplanes having a covered fuselage and fish-like tail were German. You will admit that this is stupid, although nothing is truer. But one thing is evident—that the reporters who write these foolishnesses have always ignored, and still ignore, the existence of the Morane-Parasol."

Alarm of Enemy Given. "Mechanicians, attention! I demand absolute silence! I have a very important message for you!" It was the Adjutant Pilot Pinsard who burst into our room and spoke thusly: "Wait for these orders, and above all, let no one move unless I say so," he continued in gasps, due no doubt to his rather violent entrance. By the flickering light of the lantern he read the following message, apparently received by telephone: To the Commanding Officer of the Escadrille M. S. 22:

It has been reported that 40 Uhlans are advancing towards Toul, probably with the intention of making a raid during the serenade. Prepare for the defense of the camp as rapidly as possible.

After having read the message, the Adjutant quickly lifted his head, looked around and inquired: "Are there some brave ones among you? I must have four volunteers immediately!"

As rapidly as possible I slipped into my clothes, put on my shoes, and without losing a minute, offered my services to the pilot Pinsard. "Excellent! That's very good," he said. "See that gun over there in the corner? Take it and come with me. I'll remain here alone."

"You will wait here," he said, addressing the three other mechanics. "I'll come back for you. Put out all lights and, above all, make no noise." We went out into the night together, stealthily slipping along, grazing the walls, and taking a thousand precautions to avoid being seen. Finally we arrived near a large tree which was to serve the strategic position. Already somebody was there. That somebody proved to be Marc Pource, a revolver in his right hand and a dagger in his left. His eyes were trying to pierce the darkness in the direction from which the enemy should appear. Upon seeing us he let out a sigh of relief.

New Recruits Initiated. "At last," he whispered hoarsely, "the relief. It's not too soon. Certainly it is more than half an hour that I've been on the alert."

"The relief! Not yet!" answered Pinsard. "This is only reinforcements that I have brought you."

"You understand, Lufbery," he added, turning towards me, "you are to remain here alone; I have a very important message for you." It was the Adjutant Pilot Pinsard who burst into our room and spoke thusly: "Wait for these orders, and above all, let no one move unless I say so," he continued in gasps, due no doubt to his rather violent entrance. By the flickering light of the lantern he read the following message, apparently received by telephone: To the Commanding Officer of the Escadrille M. S. 22:

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ing on a resigned air. "A la guerre, comme a la guerre! If the Uhlans come, I'll hit 'em on the head with the butt of my gun."

reached this point on May 15. The last sheets were lying on his table the next morning as he tumbled out on the field in response to an alarm and rose for the last time. An hour later his machine came down in flames and the American "ace of aces" met a terrible but glorious death.

own story of his victories will never be told; but he has left as a legacy the simple, unpretentious tale of his love for the air and for France that led him before the war into weird adventures in strange lands, and brought him on the first of August, 1914, among the crowd of foreigners in Paris clamoring to fight for justice and liberty—"feeling rather foolish, but serious about it as well."

An insect of the Hercules variety, weighing three ounces, was able to support on its back a brick weighing more than a pound. A human being, if subjected to a proportionate weight, would be crushed.

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