D'ANNUNZIO SEES FLYING TANKS BOMBING BERLIN

Famous Italian Airman, Son of the Gallant Poet and Philosopher, Talks Enthusiastically of the Day When Huge Airplanes Will Attack the Kaiser's Capital and Pay Back in the Coin of Death and Destruction for All the Terror the Hun Has Wrought.

"TO bomb Berlin; that's my object!" Captain Hugo V. d'Annunzio, aviator, inventor and son of Gabrielle d'Annunzio, the Italian author and poet of world fame, leaned against the wing of the propeller of his Liberty Caproni biplane in the Caproni hangar on Aviation Field No. 1, Mineola, Long Island.

He had not raised his voice, but something in his tone attracted the attention of four of his mechanics who had been tinkering with the machinery of the aeroplane. Along with three or four Italian officers, a stray Frenchman and one American aviation lieutenant they gathered about to listen as the young captain told of the work he has been doing toward war aviation perfection at Mineola since he was sent to this country ten months ago by the Italian government. His sudden audience disturbed the aeroplane expert a little, but a question soon had him speaking fluently, eagerly, on the subject that has engrossed his interests ever since 1909, when he saw Glenn Curtiss, the American aviator, give a flying exhibition in Italy.

"Yes, indeed," continued young d'Annunzio, [illegible] a trace of Italian pronunciation in his speech, "if the war lasts more than another year the Allies will be flying all over the German lines in flying tanks! Do you understand what that means? Heavily armored biplanes and triplanes will soon be skimming low above the German lines, mowing down Huns with torrents of machine gun bullets, just as hail beats down a wheat field.

"And the gunners and pilots in the machines will be as safe as soldiers in one of the big tanks that America is sending across these days. Tanks, then, will be divided into two classes—land tanks and air tanks. Nothing but a huge shell will have any effect on either variety."

"And after the war what will happen to aviation?" Captain d'Annunzio was asked.

"Hmm!" meditated the Italian, stroking his smooth shaven, handsome face. "I believe that this world war in many ways may have hindered the progress of aviation. Every energy is bent on developing all sorts of machinery to its highest war efficiency. For instance, Caproni, whom I call my master, although the Italian inventor is only two years older than myself, at the beginning of this war constructed a wonderful three-engine triplane of 2,100 horse power, and it was his object to attempt a transatlantic flight in the machine.

"But the war, of course, stopped the development of such a machine and prohibited any such attempt. Of course, with aviation in its swaddling clothes, so to speak, it was useless to think of perfecting a flying contrivance big enough and strong enough to act as transport or as a capable carrier of munitions. At the outbreak of war France, Great Britain, Italy, America and Germany and Austria began pushing the development of machines that could be used for bombing purposes, for scouting duty, for speed. Naturally, the experiments of peace times were neglected. Now, it seems to me, the next step is the building of a machine that will be the equivalent in the air of what a tank is on land. It is almost certain to come before the war is over."

"And that will be?"—

"When Berlin has been bombed! Bombed thrice as thoroughly as she has bombed London and Paris; bombed until the Germans cry for mercy as they scuttle for shelter like rats. Every advance the Allies make means a shortening of the time when the capital of Hunland is treated to a dose of its own baptism of fire and death. Long before the allied troops march triumphantly into Berlin will that city have been paid in full with its own coin of destruction."

Captain d'Annunzio bent swiftly, gracefully to show the trap door under his Liberty-Caproni machine's body through which may be dropped the 1,800 pounds of explosives his biplane can carry. His is an athletic, stalwart form, well set off by the neat, gray-blue uniform of an Italian aviation captain. His face and hands are tanned by his outdoor life, and the breadth of his shoulders is such that it makes him look a trifle under medium height. The eyes of the young captain are a dark hazel—quick, bright and full of the keenest intelligence. When he spoke of bombing Berlin they grew black and flashed their emotion. He is thirty-two years old.

But about him there is nothing of the poet that one might expect in the son of Gabrielle d'Annunzio. Indeed, as the good looking young caiptan says himself:—

"My father has all the poetry of the family, although just now he is too busy as commander of a wing of Italian aeroplanes—that is, twenty-four machines—to do much in the line of literature and verse. However, as he has written something like twelve books of verse and prose since the war began, I think he has done his share in writing the world's literature about the war.

"I, personally, never felt the poetic urge save once when I thought myself in love. My bent has always been toward machinery, and ever since I saw your Glenn Curtiss fly in Italy, in 1909, I have been devoting myself to aviation. By the way, there is a story illustrative of my father's character in Curtiss' visit to Italy. He was invited to go up with the American, but as there was but one seat in the machine, my father, now Major d'Annunzio, climbed out on a wing of the machine and sailed over the clouds, retaining his seat by clutching a wire support.

"When Italy went to war," the captain continued, willing to talk more freely about himself, now that most of his audience had dispersed and gone back to their duties, "I entered the artillery branch of the service and served for nine months. But Gianni Caproni, the inventor, was doing splendid war work in the advancement of aeronautics, and, as he knew I had made some effort in that direction myself, he asked the government to release me from the artillery so that I could work as chief engineer in his factory. Then ten months ago Italy sent me to America to see if I could not fit American Liberty twelve cylinder engines to a Caproni biplane design.

"I have succeeded. In the most recent test of the Liberty-Caproni bombing biplane, [illegible] with three Liberty motors of the low compression type and each of 325 horse power we climbed to a height of 16,400 feet in thirty-seven minutes. We made 10,000 feet in twelve, and mind you, the machine weighs 12,000 pounds, and just for the fun of the thing we joy rode above the cloud tops with ten passengers, some of them my machinists who refused to be left behind and who went with us clinging to guy ropes or anything else they could. The work has been successful. The Liberty-Caproni is the fastest, best bombing machine that has been produced.

"Soon I shall go to Detroit, where I shall supervise the manufacture of the machines for the United States."

The interview was interrupted at this point by Lieutenant Giuliano Parvis, the Italian Ace who has eight German and Austrian planes to his credit. Lieutenant Parvis, a strikingly handsome young fellow, dark of hair and eyes and tanned of countenance, was introduced as the pilot who, with young d'Annunzio, will attempt to fly across the Atlantic in the Caproni triplane as soon as peace makes such a trial flight possible. Parvis in Italy has been associated with Major Francesco Baracca, the famous Italian Ace, who was killed in the last Austrian offensive when flying fifty feet above the trenches, cutting down the Austrians with his machine gun fire. Major Baracca had fifty-two official planes on the list of enemy machines that he had sent tumbling in flames to earth.

"The American public does not understand the vital need for three engines in a bombing plane," declared the lieutenant, joining in the discussion. "If an aviator suffers the puncture of one engine by a bullet, he can still manoeuvre with the other two, and even if two of his engines are disabled, he can plane to safety on the third. Now the German Gothas have but two engines; the American machines have but single or double engines, and even the speedy French machines have but two. Think of the air supremacy the Allies will hold when their aviators begin using bombing planes with triple engines!"

Lieutenant Parvis strode to one end of the Caproni hangar and returned dragging eight huge framed canvases, all bearing the black cross which distinguishes German and Austrian aeroplanes. The canvases had been ripped from the enemey planes downed by Parvis.

"These fellows," said Parvis, tapping the trophies with his swagger stick, "might still be alive if their Gothas had had three engines instead of two. Don't forget that the Liberty-Caproni machine has its three engines separated—one on each side of the machine's body, and one in the rear of the body itself."

"But if the spread of the Caproni's wing tips is seventy-six feet, is it not an easy mark for anti-aircraft guns?"

"No," answered D'Annunzio, "because most bombing is done at night. In any case the Liberty-Caproni machine can climb so fast that it is soon outside reach of the guns, which have very poor accuracy when firing at a plane 14,000 feet up."

"What about these new bombing planes Germany is supposed to be using—the ones capable of seating eight men and carrying a bomb thirteen feet long and containing 2,000 pounds of explosive?"

"Nonsense!" said the captain. "That story is just a foolish newspaper yarn, probably coined in the heated imagination of some reporter at the front. First, since most bombing is done at night, there is no need for eight men. Their weight could be taken up by so many pounds of explosives. The only need for several gunners in a bombing plane is during daylight.

"Listen to a list of what a Liberty-Caproni carries without danger to itself by overweight:—Two pilots, two gunners, six gasolene tanks, three oil tanks, three engines, 1,800 pounds of bombs, four machine guns, and, sometimes, a gun capable of firing a one and one-half inch shell. Nothing like a Liberty-Caproni for bombing purposes has yet been used at the front.

"As for the difference in aviators, well, there is not very much. It takes brave men to make a nation, and it takes brave and clever young men to make good aviators. England has them; France has them; Italy and America have them. Germany and Austria, too. If I were to speak about the relative efficiency of aviators, I should point out that one reason why American young men learn so quickly to fly is because of their familiarity with sport. From children they have been accustomed to train their eyes, hands and nerves. They take to aviation like—like young birds to the wing.

"See! Outside the hangar a group of soldiers is marching. See how they swing along—swift, easy strided; hands swinging? Big fellows all. Aren't they? Well, you Americans are a stalwart race and your boys from childhood are used to hard exercise. That's why they make such fine soldiers.

"Young women, too, are splendid," went on the young Italian, his hazel eyes kindling. "Tennis, swimming, skating, basket ball and other sports they learn in school, and college helps them develop into wonderful women. I think some of them would make remarkable aviators, and I think there are many who would like it. That's an idea! Why not train hardy young women as aviators to carry messengers and so forth, flying behind the lines, and thus release male aviators for the fighting?"

There came a shout from Lieutenant Parvis, who was examining a wing tip of the lower plane. Then came a quick sputter of Italian between the two officers, and a little later Captain D'Annunzio translated amiliably:—

"Lieutenant Parvis says that our mascot, the little rag doll called a Gutty-Wauk, tied to the end of the lower right wing tip, is losing its amulnut. That will never do! He shall be sewed up properly before we fly again. That little doll flew with Parvis in every one of his engagements over the Italian front.

"Once, Parvis says, his little mascot deflected a bullet that otherwise would have penetrated his gasolene tank."

"And if the bullet had hit the tank?"

"In that case, as we say in Italian, it would have been, 'Buona Sera'!"

Airman's Adventure in the Clouds

How an airman got lost in the clouds, and after a thrilling experience, during which he was shelled by "Archies" and fired on by pursuing enemy machines, eventually was the means of turning a battle in favor of the French, is told by Captain Paul Bewsher, a British soldier.

The pilot was flying in France from one airdrome to another well behind the lines. His was the last machine of a flight of five, which struck across country and soon afterward ran into clouds. He lost sight of his companions and eventually found himself over a rolling sea of clouds, quite alone.

Looking around the sky he saw in the distance several black specks. Thinking they were his companions, he turned around and flew straight toward them. But when he drew near they dived down upon him firing their machine guns. He had a quick vision of a black Maltese cross, and realizing that he was hopelessly outnumbered he put his nose down and sped away.

His compass showed him that he was flying due east, away from his own lines. He could not turn, for wherever he looked behind he saw the group of machines not far behind his tail. For twenty minutes he flew, hotly pursued, across the endless carpet of white clouds, and at last outdistanced the Germans. Now, knowing that he was well over German occupied territory, he turned once more and flew due west for half an hour.

He then throttled down and drifted slowly down through the sunlit cloud barrier, until he came in view of the gray familiar world below, and at once began to look out for an airdrome on which to land. He saw a group of hangars some ten or fifteen miles away. Across country to it he flew and began to land. He drew nearer and nearer to the ground, glided over the trees and began to "flatten out" a few feet off the surface of the airdrome, when suddenly, to his amazement, he saw once more the black crosses on the aeroplanes beneath him. He was still in the midst of the enemy. Even as he realized the truth, the Germans began firing machine guns at him, while excited mechanics began swinging the propellers of the machines in order to start the engines.

He could not climb, as that would be to lose too much needful speed and distance. He kept only a few feet off the ground, and saw his only chance was to fly back toward the lines very low. Jumping over trees and hedges as best he could, he fled away, pursued by the angry German hounds which he could see a mile or so behind him. He now realized that a stiffish wind had been blowing from the west, which had carried him far behind the lines, and he had not allowed himself enough time before he dived through the clouds.

Meanwhile he flew on, pursued hotly for the second time, and drew near the lines. Ahead of him he could see a cloudy turmoil of smoke and bursting shells and flying earth. A big attack was evidently in progress. The air was full of the white puffs of the shrapnel breaking low over the troops. Straight toward this maelstrom he flew, and soon machine guns on the ground began to fire on him.

So low was he that all around him now the barrage blazed and roared. Above the sound of the engines he could hear the thud and crash of the great shells bursting beneath. Once he felt an instinct to pull back his control stick, and as he shot upward he saw a shrapnel burst just below him, where he would have been had he not climbed. These were moments of intense excitement. Below him at a certain point he could see gray masses of Germans collecting for a counter attack. He realized that this might mean important information, and so when at last he crossed the lines he landed as soon as he possibly could, crashing into a shell hole.

He crawled out of the wreckage and ran stumbling across the shell torn earth, found a French headquarters near by, and reported what he had seen.

The information proved of notable importance. Action was taken at once, and the tide of that battle was turned in France's favor. The next day the airman arrived, but without a machine, at his own airdrome.

How Fonck Fights His Big Battles

Lieutenant Fonck, the leading French ace, in an interview has disclosed some of the methods he follows in his air battles. He believes in group formation for fighting, saying that the time is passed for aerial fighting as an individual sport, such as it was practiced at the start by Pegoud, Garros, Gilbert, Navarre and even Guynemer and Nungesser.

"The Germans," he says, "when they inaugurated group flying, taught us and, unfortunately, made us pay dearly for the lesson, of the dangers attending an effete method. But I am by no means a partisan of flying in over big groups like that of the 'Richthofen circus.' I generally fly with two comrades—'a group of three'—and I am inclined to favor several groups of three, sufficiently distant not to hinder each other's operations, but also sufficiently near to understand one another and give help at crucial moments.

"Too big a number may easily prove a peril, especially against a clever and daring enemy capable of practising the only tactics suited to the occasion, which is to throw himself into the middle of a group, paralyzing thus his adversaries who can neither manoeuvre nor fire, for fear of injuring one another, whilst he, on the contrary, retains every facility of action. The Boches have had a bitter experience of this, as it was from a patrol of seven that I brought down my last [illegible] machines."

If, in a combat, an aviator gets on the "blind" side of his enemy, it is only a matter of straight and quick shooting to send him tumbling in flames. By the "blind" side is meant those sections of the plane which cut off the aviator's vision. Hence it was that the Germans invented the "flying circus." They flew in a circle, the Huns, so that every man was thoroughly covered by the man behind and on the side of him. In that way they were able to ward off surprise attacks. The French and the British soon found the only way they could successfully fight one of those "flying circuses" was to fly in similar formation.

The reason why most aeroplanes fall in flames after defeat is because when a bullet hits a gasolene tank the friction of the missile going through the metal causes heat which explodes the liquid. Besides that, American aviators are now using "tracer" bullets. These deadly bits of lead are bullets with a small groove scooped out in the shell of the missiles. The space is filled with powder which leaves a line of smoke behind in its flight, and which is sure to explode an oil or gasolene tank if it penetrates. By the smoke line the aviator gunner is able to see how accurately his bullets speed. Every third bullet or so in a machine gun belt is a "tracer."