

## TERRIBLE AND COSTLY BLUNDERS IN AIRCRAFT PRODUCTION.

### As Revealed by America's "Ace of Aces" in His Recently Published Book.

By Clarence B. Miller, former member of Congress from Missouri.

(Continued from last week.)

We must not overlook the fact that our American boys at that time, and for three weeks, had been fighting the very cream of the German aviation service. We were fighting the Flying Circus, which represented the acme of perfection in equipment and skill of aviation. This Flying Circus had been developed under the famous Baron Richtofen, who proved to be the German genius in aviation during the war. Against these highly trained, picked men of the German aviation force, equipped with everything that science and genius and money could provide to make them efficient, were our American boys, whose experience had been extremely limited, most of them not having any at all, and all of them equipped with an out of date and greatly inferior weapon. While the 49th squadron to which Captain Rickenbacker belonged was equipped on August 8th with Spads, it is not to be inferred that all of the Americans at that date were thus equipped. The great bulk of them were not. Most of them continued on, fighting with the same old, discarded Nieuports. It is much unlike equipping an army with pitch forks, cythes and sickles, and sending them forth to battle with a compact army equipped with repeating rifles and high-power artillery?

But the American people should demand to know those who are responsible for this humiliating failure of American preparation and this tremendous sacrifice of American life, due to inefficiency and graft at home. When the men responsible are found out they should never again be permitted to lift up their head among decent folk. The hand of scorn should ever be pointed at them and just retribution for their crimes heaped upon them.

**Incomprehensible to the Fighters.**  
It is difficult for Americans, especially now that the war is over—Americans who were in the midst of comforts and secure in their homes—difficult, I say, for them to visualize and understand the heart-racking feeling that followed our American

aviators who were called upon to perform prodigies in the air, respecting the failure of their country properly to equip them. Speaking of this, on page 228, Captain Rickenbacker says:

"The fighters on the front can never understand why the authorities back home denied them necessary arms and ammunition. The air fighters cannot understand why we cannot have parachutes fitted on our airplanes to give the doomed pilot one possible means to escape from this terrible death."

In the above quotation Captain Rickenbacker calls attention to an appliance with which all the German planes at that time were equipped, an appliance which was found extraordinarily valuable in saving human lives. A man whose machine catches on fire ten thousand feet in the air and whose engine is completely disabled and whose wings are perhaps destroyed has no chance to live. He is already dead. If, perchance, he dies by the air route the death is one of the most horrible the mind of man can imagine. Living flesh and blood becomes a flaming torch, speeding through the air. Fighting pilots do not want to die, but they are not afraid to die. Not a one, however, who does not feel his soul shrivel when he thinks his death will be a flaming death. That is the one horrible thing about which aviators tremble. Our government was not only not equipping planes with such life-saving appliance, but it was not even equipping our men with planes at all, they depending on second rate planes discarded by the French, and British. On page 228 Captain Rickenbacker makes the significant statement in reference to the death of Major Lufbery, who was at that time the American ace of aces, the most famous of American airmen, and perhaps the most beloved aviator our service produced:

"Lufbery and a score of other American aviators might have been saved to their country if this matter of aeroplane equipment had been left to experienced pilots."

So much for the fighting planes with which our men were equipped.

On page 283, speaking of the total lack of aircraft to aid the Americans

from the time they were thrown in, June 1, on the very end he says:

"Infantry officers have told me that rarely have they seen an American aeroplane over them when it was needed to chase away enemy machines, and that Huns repeatedly came over them at low altitudes, strafing the troops with machine gun fire to their great danger and demoralization."

We know beyond all question that in that terrible hand-to-hand fighting when our men took Bellou Wood, Torcy and Bouresche, and also when they first went in a little later to break the German attack German aviators flew low over the heads of our men, raking them with machine gun fire.

Major Lufbery, the beloved of the beloved American aviators, and at the time of his death the ace of aces, died the horrible death of being burned alive. He almost saved himself. He manipulated his plane with all the skill at his command, making a valiant flight for his life, and kept the flames away from him for a long time, but at last, and just before he reached the ground, a burst of flames consumed him, and his machine. Had his plane been equipped with the appliance with which all German planes were equipped, namely, the little parachute, he and many others would today be alive.

Speaking of this attachment the German aviators enjoyed, Captain Rickenbacker, on page 318, in the following language, described how beautifully it worked. He says:

"I was almost equally gratified to see the German pilot level off his machine and with a sudden leap over board into space let the Fokker slip safely away from him. Attached to his back and sides was a rope, which immediately pulled the parachute from the bottom of the 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 death, bearing with it a human being who was 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 human contrivances and why our country would not at least equip them for saving American pilots from being burned to a crisp."

As Captain Rickenbacker above pointed out, no American made fighting planes ever appeared in the war zone. No American air fighters ever fought in an American made plane.

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In America we had been tinkering and tinkering and experimenting and experimenting to produce something new in the way of fighting craft. Military experts and common, ordinary experts had the same thought. Great Britain and France had been in this war now almost three years. The kind of planes with which the war started were out of date within six months, nearly every six months had seen a new type of plane with marked superiority over its predecessors, but at the present time both countries had developed an extraordinary highly efficient and serviceable plane. Why should not the United States take the best of the types that thus have been produced and fight right, manufacturing them in great quantities, and at the same time keeping up its experiments in the present effort to produce better planes? They should start right where the allies were when we entered the war and not start where the allies began three years ago.

#### The Aircraft Production Board.

But that is not what the administration did at all. An aircraft production board was formed and six gentlemen placed upon it, nearly all of whom were automobile manufacturers. It has now been well established, and we acknowledge it to ourselves with a sinking at the pit of our stomachs, that our valiant secretary of war placed on this aircraft production board men who formed a plan to produce a new type of engine different from any other kind in the world. In other words, these men became interested, not in making types of planes perfected by the British and the French, not in utilizing the efficient motors then in use but in making a brand new plane with a brand new motor, both different from anything else in the world.

It is to be observed at this time the British and French planes were both largely equipped with motors that were not made in Great Britain or France. The common type of motor then most servicable in fighting planes was the Hispano-Suiza, which is an engine that was purely Spanish, it having been invented originally by a Swiss engineer, who had it manufactured in Spain. So these men who were interested in aircraft production stumped along in perfecting both a type of plane and perfecting a type of engine. We sit back now and blush to ourselves when we think of how these men and our government utterly deceived the American people in reference to the character of the engine and in reference to the state of this production. The truth is the Liberty motor, which all the advertising which our government gave it, was never a servicable engine before the war ended except in the restricted field of bombing planes, and never will be any good for a fighting machine.

The clumsy contraption our war department finally sent to France to serve as bombing planes early attracted the attention of everybody because of some extremely imperfect features connected with them. They almost at once received the name of "flaming coffins." Captain Rickenbacker, on page 239, thus speaks of them:

"They had come! A large flotilla of American flaming coffins, as their pilots called the Liberty engines, were coming home at 12,000 feet after a bombardment of Metz. And

just behind them and a little above, were four very fast moving Fokkers. I stuck up my nose and began climbing for the sun."

Thus it is that Captain Rickenbacker began his account of the grilling fight he had with these four Fokkers. Notwithstanding the tremendous odds he outmaneuvered them and outgouged them, and after destroying one plane with his pilot he got safely away. These four Fokkers were part of the Richtofen circus and were four of the greatest air fighters in all of Germany.

#### At The End of the War.

A few more of these bombing planes made in America, equipped with Liberty motors, made their appearance in France at the very end of the war. They were only there a few days, but in that short time they had received the sobriquet of "flaming coffins." They were tried, of course, but a limited number of times solely as bombing planes.

On page 337, in the very last moments of the war, Captain Rickenbacker thus speaks of the situation of the clumsy liberty machines.

"Thousands and thousands of German troops had been unloaded from trains during the previous night and were now hidden in Grand Pre and its neighborhood. The enemy fighting machines were out in force to defend this spot against bombing planes until these troops had an opportunity for moving and scattering themselves along their front. From every quarter Fokkers were peeping upon the clumsy Liberty machines, which, with their criminally constructed fuel tanks, afforded an easy target to the incendiary bullets of the enemy, their unfortunate pilots called this boasted achievement of our aviation department their "flaming coffins." During that one brief fight over Grand Pre I saw three of these crude machines go down in flames, an American pilot in each flaming coffin, dying this frightful and needless death."

The extreme need of air fighters to aid our boys when they were first thrown into the gap to stop the huge German drive did all but crush civilization appears from the testimony of very experienced witnesses.

This is the end of our aircraft effort. A few flaming coffins represent the effort of the mightiest nation in the world and the largest expenditure of the largest sum ever expended on aviation of any nation in the world. A more complete and humiliating failure never occurred in the history of man or war. Remember we started out early in 1917 to place on the firing line the 1st of May, 1918, twenty thousand fighting craft. We promised this to our allies; we promised this to our people. Our people did their part. They gave of their money without stint or delay. Congress in all appropriated for aircraft during the war upwards of two billion dollars. There was ample funds to put the prodigious sum of twenty thousand fighting planes in the fighting area. The extent of failure is complete. The American people should never be content and never rest easy until they separate out those who performed criminal acts in connection with this failure and prosecute them to the fullest extent of the law. American people should never rest until they have picked out those whose procrastinations, delays, inefficiency and extravagance gave

opportunity for rascality and, in addition, caused this mammoth failure. Unless a republic protects itself by thus punishing those who so betray it no republic can expect to live. This colossal failure is directly due, first, to the secretary of war, and secondly to those other officials in the war department whom the President of the United States and the secretary of war brought into the aircraft business. The administration can blame no one but itself. Let the American people never forget those boys that thus died in vain and ever forget those who so basely betrayed America in her hour of peril.

#### Participation Prohibited.

Judge J. M. Humphreys, of Atoka, Okla., calls attention to chapter 19, Page 913, Statutes at Large, to an act of March 4, 1913, which says: "Hereafter the executive shall not extend or accept any invitation to participate in any international congress, conference or like event without first having specific authority of law to do so." Mr. Humphreys declares that this act specifically prohibited President Wilson from going to Paris as a participant in the conference which formulated the league of nations. It is not clear why President Wilson's authority to participate in a world congress for the formulation of a world constitution had not been challenged. It was a legislative proceeding, not legitimately connected with the process of formulating a peace treaty, since the powers with whom we were making the treaty of peace are not members of the league of nations, and this provision does not apply to them. If President Wilson not only participated in this conference without legal authority, but boasted that he would tie the covenant and treaty so closely that it would be impossible to ratify the one without swallowing the other.

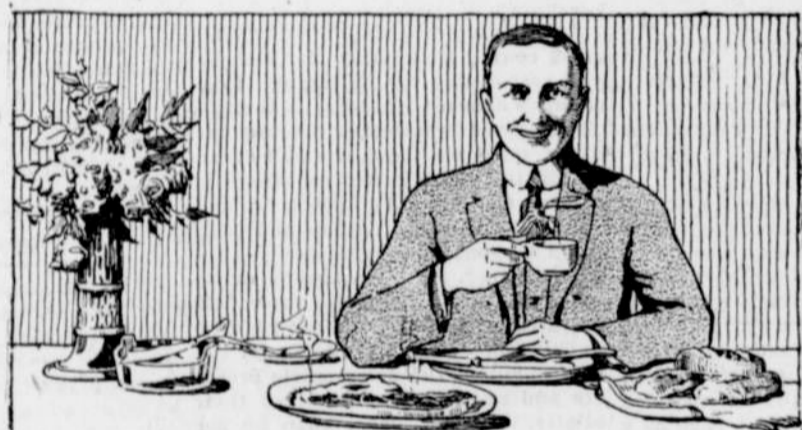
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Count Bernstorff says the Kaiser scoffed at American intervention early in 1917. Maybe he had seen some of those "He Keeps Us Out of War" posters.



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