



JAMES R. McCONNELL

"I frankly confess to a feeling of marked satisfaction at receiving that grade [Sergeant] in the world's finest army."

(See page 45)

FLYING FOR FRANCE

*With the American Escadrille
at Verdun*

BY

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ILLUSTRATED FROM
PHOTOGRAPHS THROUGH THE KIND-
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the fast-flowing stream of troops, and the distressing number of ambulances brought realization of the near presence of a gigantic battle.

Within a twenty-mile radius of the Verdun front aviation camps abound. Our escadrille was listed on the schedule with the other fighting units, each of which has its specified flying hours, rotating so there is always an *escadrille de chasse* over the lines. A field wireless to enable us to keep track of the movements of enemy planes became part of our equipment.

Lufbery joined us a few days after our arrival. He was followed by Johnson and Balsley, who had been on the air guard over Paris. Hill and Rumsey came next, and after them Masson and Pavelka. Nieuports were supplied them from the nearest depot,

and as soon as they had mounted their instruments and machine guns, they were on the job with the rest of us. Fifteen Americans are or have been members of the American Escadrille, but there have never been so many as that on duty at any one time.

BATTLES IN THE AIR

Before we were fairly settled at Bar-le-Duc, Hall brought down a German observation craft and Thaw a Fokker. Fights occurred on almost every sortie. The Germans seldom cross into our territory, unless on a bombarding jaunt, and thus practically all the fighting takes place on their side of the line. Thaw dropped his Fokker in the morning, and on the afternoon of the same day there was a

big combat far behind the German trenches. Thaw was wounded in the arm, and an explosive bullet detonating on Rockwell's wind-shield tore several gashes in his face. Despite the blood which was blinding him Rockwell managed to reach an aviation field and land. Thaw, whose wound bled profusely, landed in a dazed condition just within our lines. He was too weak to walk, and French soldiers carried him to a field dressing-station, whence he was sent to Paris for further treatment. Rockwell's wounds were less serious and he insisted on flying again almost immediately.

A week or so later Chapman was wounded. Considering the number of fights he had been in and the courage with which he attacked it was a

miracle he had not been hit before. He always fought against odds and far within the enemy's country. He flew more than any of us, never missing an opportunity to go up, and never coming down until his gasoline was giving out. His machine was a sieve of patched-up bullet holes. His nerve was almost superhuman and his devotion to the cause for which he fought sublime. The day he was wounded he attacked four machines. Swooping down from behind, one of them, a Fokker, riddled Chapman's plane. One bullet cut deep into his scalp, but Chapman, a master pilot, escaped from the trap, and fired several shots to show he was still safe. A stability control had been severed by a bullet. Chapman held the broken rod in one hand, managed his

machine with the other, and succeeded in landing on a near-by aviation field. His wound was dressed, his machine repaired, and he immediately took the air in pursuit of some more enemies. He would take no rest, and with bandaged head continued to fly and fight.

The escadrille's next serious encounter with the foe took place a few days later. Rockwell, Balsley, Prince, and Captain Thénault were surrounded by a large number of Germans, who, circling about them, commenced firing at long range. Realizing their numerical inferiority, the Americans and their commander sought the safest way out by attacking the enemy machines nearest the French lines. Rockwell, Prince, and the captain broke through success-

fully, but Balsley found himself hemmed in. He attacked the German nearest him, only to receive an explosive bullet in his thigh. In trying to get away by a vertical dive his machine went into a corkscrew and swung over on its back. Extra cartridge rollers dislodged from their case hit his arms. He was tumbling straight toward the trenches, but by a supreme effort he regained control, righted the plane, and landed without disaster in a meadow just behind the firing line.

Soldiers carried him to the shelter of a near-by fort, and later he was taken to a field hospital, where he lingered for days between life and death. Ten fragments of the explosive bullet were removed from his stomach. He bore up bravely, and

became the favourite of the wounded officers in whose ward he lay. When we flew over to see him they would say: *Il est un brave petit gars, l'aviateur américain.* [He's a brave little fellow, the American aviator.] On a shelf by his bed, done up in a handkerchief, he kept the pieces of bullet taken out of him, and under them some sheets of paper on which he was trying to write to his mother, back in El Paso.

Balsley was awarded the *Médaille Militaire* and the *Croix de Guerre*, but the honours scared him. He had seen them decorate officers in the ward before they died.

CHAPMAN'S LAST FIGHT

Then came Chapman's last fight. Before leaving, he had put two bags

of oranges in his machine to take to Balsley, who liked to suck them to relieve his terrible thirst, after the day's flying was over. There was an aerial struggle against odds, far within the German lines, and Chapman, to divert their fire from his comrades, engaged several enemy airmen at once. He sent one tumbling to earth, and had forced the others off when two more swooped down upon him. Such a fight is a matter of seconds, and one cannot clearly see what passes. Lufbery and Prince, whom Chapman had defended so gallantly, regained the French lines. They told us of the combat, and we waited on the field for Chapman's return. He was always the last in, so we were not much worried. Then a pilot from another fighting escadrille

telephoned us that he had seen a Nieuport falling. A little later the observer of a reconnaissance airplane called up and told us how he had witnessed Chapman's fall. The wings of the plane had buckled, and it had dropped like a stone he said.

We talked in lowered voices after that; we could read the pain in one another's eyes. If only it could have been some one else, was what we all thought, I suppose. To lose Victor was not an irreparable loss to us merely, but to France, and to the world as well. I kept thinking of him lying over there, and of the oranges he was taking to Balsley. As I left the field I caught sight of Victor's mechanic leaning against the end of our hangar. He was looking northward into the sky where

his *patron* had vanished, and his face was very sad.

PROMOTIONS AND DECORATIONS

By this time Prince and Hall had been made adjutants, and we corporals transformed into sergeants. I frankly confess to a feeling of marked satisfaction at receiving that grade in the world's finest army. I was a far more important person, in my own estimation, than I had been as a second lieutenant in the militia at home. The next impressive event was the awarding of decorations. We had assisted at that ceremony for Cowdin at Luxeuil, but this time three of our messmates were to be honoured for the Germans they had brought down. Rockwell and Hall received the *Médaille Militaire* and the *Croix*

de Guerre, and Thaw, being a lieutenant, the *Légion d'honneur* and another "palm" for the ribbon of the *Croix de Guerre* he had won previously. Thaw, who came up from Paris specially for the presentation, still carried his arm in a sling.

There were also decorations for Chapman, but poor Victor, who so often had been cited in the Orders of the Day, was not on hand to receive them.

THE MORNING SORTIE

Our daily routine goes on with little change. Whenever the weather permits—that is, when it isn't raining, and the clouds aren't too low—we fly over the Verdun battlefield at the hours dictated by General Headquarters. As a rule the most successful sorties are those in the early morning.

We are called while it's still dark. Sleepily I try to reconcile the French orderly's muttered, *C'est l'heure, monsieur*, that rouses me from slumber, with the strictly American words and music of "When That Midnight Choo Choo Leaves for Alabam'" warbled by a particularly wide-awake pilot in the next room. A few minutes later, having swallowed some coffee, we motor to the field. The east is turning gray as the hangar curtains are drawn apart and our machines trundled out by the mechanics. All the pilots whose planes are in commission—save those remaining behind on guard—prepare to leave. We average from four to six on a sortie, unless too many flights have been ordered for that day, in which case only two or three go out at a time.

Now the east is pink, and overhead the sky has changed from gray to pale blue. It is light enough to fly. We don our fur-lined shoes and combinations, and adjust the leather flying hoods and goggles. A good deal of conversation occurs—perhaps because, once aloft, there's nobody to talk to.

“Eh, you,” one pilot cries jokingly to another, “I hope some Boche just ruins you this morning, so I won't have to pay you the fifty francs you won from me last night!”

This financial reference concerns a poker game.

“You do, do you?” replies the other as he swings into his machine. “Well, I'd be glad to pass up the fifty to see you landed by the Boches. You'd make a fine sight walking down

the street of some German town in those wooden shoes and pyjama pants. Why don't you dress yourself? Don't you know an aviator's supposed to look *chic*?”

A sartorial eccentricity on the part of one of our colleagues is here referred to.

GETTING UNDER WAY

The raillery is silenced by a deafening roar as the motors are tested. Quiet is briefly restored, only to be broken by a series of rapid explosions incidental to the trying out of machine guns. You loudly inquire at what altitude we are to meet above the field.

“Fifteen hundred metres—go ahead!” comes an answering yell.

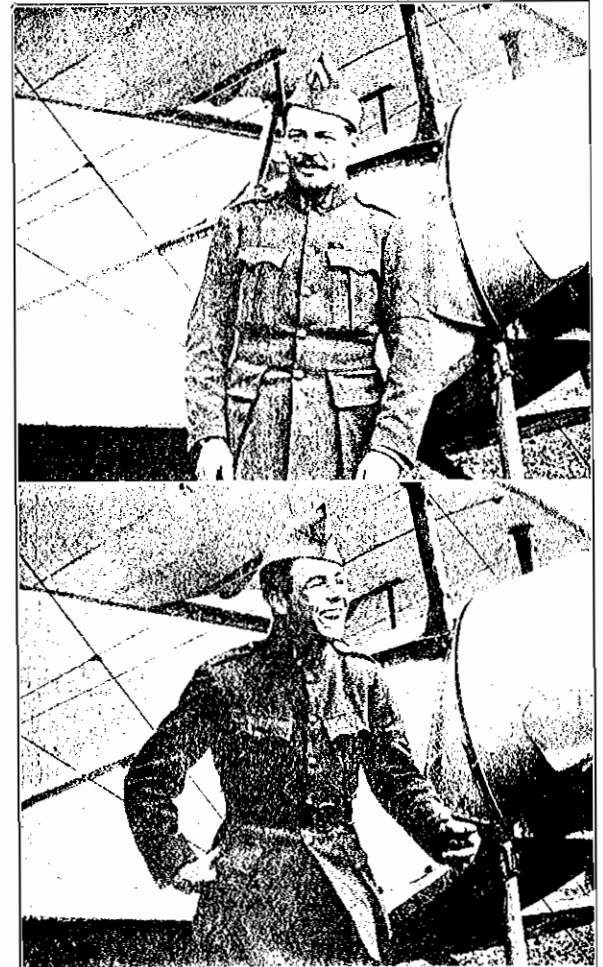
Essence et gaz! [Oil and gas!] you

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call to your mechanic, adjusting your gasoline and air throttles while he grips the propeller.

Contact! he shrieks, and *Contact!* you reply. You snap on the switch, he spins the propeller, and the motor takes. Drawing forward out of line, you put on full power, race across the grass and take the air. The ground drops as the hood slants up before you and you seem to be going more and more slowly as you rise. At a great height you hardly realize you are moving. You glance at the clock to note the time of your departure, and at the oil gauge to see its throb. The altimeter registers 650 feet. You turn and look back at the field below and see others leaving.

In three minutes you are at about 4,000 feet. You have been making



TWO MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN ESCADRILLE
Of the French Flying Service, who were killed flying for France

Upper picture: Norman Prince, of Boston, Mass.
Lower picture: Victor Chapman, of New York City

wide circles over the field and watching the other machines. At 4,500 feet you throttle down and wait on that level for your companions to catch up. Soon the escadrille is bunched and off for the lines. You begin climbing again, gulping to clear your ears in the changing pressure. Surveying the other machines, you recognize the pilot of each by the marks on its side—or by the way he flies. The distinguishing marks of the Nieuports are various and sometimes amusing. Bert Hall, for instance, has BERT painted on the left side of his plane and the same word reversed (as if spelled backward with the left hand) on the right—so an aviator passing him on that side at great speed will be able to read the name without difficulty, he says!

The country below has changed into a flat surface of varicoloured figures. Woods are irregular blocks of dark green, like daubs of ink spilled on a table; fields are geometrical designs of different shades of green and brown, forming in composite an ultracubist painting; roads are thin white lines, each with its distinctive windings and crossings—from which you determine your location. The higher you are the easier it is to read.

In about ten minutes you see the Meuse sparkling in the morning light, and on either side the long line of sausage-shaped observation balloons far below you. Red-roofed Verdun springs into view just beyond. There are spots in it where no red shows and you know what has happened there. In the green pasture land bordering

the town, round flecks of brown indicate the shell holes. You cross the Meuse.

VERDUN, SEEN FROM THE SKY

Immediately east and north of Verdun there lies a broad, brown band. From the Woevre plain it runs westward to the "S" bend in the Meuse, and on the left bank of that famous stream continues on into the Argonne Forest. Peaceful fields and farms and villages adorned that landscape a few months ago—when there was no Battle of Verdun. Now there is only that sinister brown belt, a strip of murdered Nature. It seems to belong to another world. Every sign of humanity has been swept away. The woods and roads have vanished like chalk wiped from a blackboard; of

the villages nothing remains but gray smears where stone walls have tumbled together. The great forts of Douaumont and Vaux are outlined faintly, like the tracings of a finger in wet sand. One cannot distinguish any one shell crater, as one can on the pockmarked fields on either side. On the brown band the indentations are so closely interlocked that they blend into a confused mass of troubled earth. Of the trenches only broken, half-obiterated links are visible.

Columns of muddy smoke spurt up continually as high explosives tear deeper into this ulcered area. During heavy bombardment and attacks I have seen shells falling like rain. The countless towers of smoke remind one of Gustave Doré's picture of the fiery tombs of the arch-heretics in

Dante's "Hell." A smoky pall covers the sector under fire, rising so high that at a height of 1,000 feet one is enveloped in its mist-like fumes. Now and then monster projectiles hurtling through the air close by leave one's plane rocking violently in their wake. Airplanes have been cut in two by them.

THE ROAR OF BATTLE—UNHEARD

For us the battle passes in silence, the noise of one's motor deadening all other sounds. In the green patches behind the brown belt myriads of tiny flashes tell where the guns are hidden; and those flashes, and the smoke of bursting shells, are all we see of the fighting. It is a weird combination of stillness and havoc, the Verdun conflict viewed from the sky.

Far below us, the observation and range-finding planes circle over the trenches like gliding gulls. At a feeble altitude they follow the attacking infantrymen and flash back wireless reports of the engagement. Only through them can communication be maintained when, under the barrier fire, wires from the front lines are cut. Sometimes it falls to our lot to guard these machines from Germans eager to swoop down on their backs. Sailing about high above a busy flock of them makes one feel like an old mother hen protecting her chicks.

“NAVIGATING” IN A SEA OF CLOUDS

The pilot of an *avion de chasse* must not concern himself with the ground, which to him is useful only for learning his whereabouts. The

earth is all-important to the men in the observation, artillery-regulating, and bombardment machines, but the fighting aviator has an entirely different sphere. His domain is the blue heavens, the glistening rolls of clouds below the fleecy banks towering above, the vague aerial horizon, and he must watch it as carefully as a navigator watches the storm-tossed sea.

On days when the clouds form almost a solid flooring, one feels very much at sea, and wonders if one is in the navy instead of aviation. The diminutive Nieuports skirt the white expanse like torpedo boats in an arctic sea, and sometimes, far across the cloud-waves, one sights an enemy escadrille, moving as a fleet.

Principally our work consists of

keeping German airmen away from our lines, and in attacking them when opportunity offers. We traverse the brown band and enter enemy territory to the accompaniment of an anti-aircraft cannonade. Most of the shots are wild, however, and we pay little attention to them. When the shrapnel comes uncomfortably close, one shifts position slightly to evade the range. One glances up to see if there is another machine higher than one's own. Low and far within the German lines are several enemy planes, a dull white in appearance, resembling sand flies against the mottled earth. High above them one glimpses the mosquito-like forms of two Fokkers. Away off to one side white shrapnel puffs are vaguely visible, perhaps directed against a German crossing

the lines. We approach the enemy machines ahead, only to find them slanting at a rapid rate into their own country. High above them lurks a protection plane. The man doing the "ceiling work," as it is called, will look after him for us.

TACTICS OF AN AIR BATTLE

Getting started is the hardest part of an attack. Once you have begun diving you're all right. The pilot just ahead turns tail up like a trout dropping back to water, and swoops down in irregular curves and circles. You follow at an angle so steep your feet seem to be holding you back in your seat. Now the black Maltese crosses on the German's wings stand out clearly. You think of him as some sort of big bug. Then you hear

the rapid tut-tut-tut of his machine gun. The man that dived ahead of you becomes mixed up with the top-most German. He is so close it looks as if he had hit the enemy machine. You hear the staccato barking of his mitrailleuse and see him pass from under the German's tail.

The rattle of the gun that is aimed at you leaves you undisturbed. Only when the bullets pierce the wings a few feet off do you become uncomfortable. You see the gunner crouched down behind his weapon, but you aim at where the pilot ought to be—there are two men aboard the German craft—and press on the release hard. Your mitrailleuse hammers out a stream of bullets as you pass over and dive, nose down, to get out of range. Then, hopefully, you re-dress and look back

at the foe. He ought to be dropping earthward at several miles a minute. As a matter of fact, however, he is sailing serenely on. They have an annoying habit of doing that, these Boches.

Rockwell, who attacked so often that he has lost all count, and who shoves his machine gun fairly in the faces of the Germans, used to swear their planes were armoured. Lieutenant de Laage, whose list of combats is equally extensive, has brought down only one. Hall, with three machines to his credit, has had more luck. Lufbery, who evidently has evolved a secret formula, has dropped four, according to official statistics, since his arrival on the Verdun front. Four "palms"—the record for the escadrille, glitter upon the ribbon of

the *Croix de Guerre* accompanying his *Médaille Militaire*.¹

A pilot seldom has the satisfaction of beholding the result of his bull's-eye bullet. Rarely—so difficult it is to follow the turnings and twistings of the dropping plane—does he see his fallen foe strike the ground. Lufbery's last direct hit was an exception, for he followed all that took place from a balcony seat. I myself was in the "nigger-heaven," so I know. We had set out on a sortie together just before noon, one August day, and for the first time on such an occasion had lost each other over the lines. Seeing no Germans, I passed my time hovering over the French observation machines. Lufbery found one, however,

¹This book was written in the fall of 1915. Since that time many additional machines have been credited to the American flyers.

and promptly brought it down. Just then I chanced to make a southward turn, and caught sight of an airplane falling out of the sky into the German lines.

As it turned over, it showed its white belly for an instant, then seemed to straighten out, and planed downward in big zigzags. The pilot must have gripped his controls even in death, for his craft did not tumble as most do. It passed between my line of vision and a wood, into which it disappeared. Just as I was going down to find out where it landed, I saw it again skimming across a field, and heading straight for the brown band beneath me. It was outlined against the shell-racked earth like a tiny insect, until just northwest of Fort Douaumont it crashed down upon the

battlefield. A sheet of flame and smoke shot up from the tangled wreckage. For a moment or two I watched it burn; then I went back to the observation machines.

I thought Lufbery would show up and point to where the German had fallen. He failed to appear, and I began to be afraid it was he whom I had seen come down, instead of an enemy. I spent a worried hour before my return homeward. After getting back I learned that Lufbery was quite safe, having hurried in after the fight to report the destruction of his adversary before somebody else claimed him, which is only too frequently the case. Observation posts, however, confirmed Lufbery's story, and he was of course very much delighted. Nevertheless, at luncheon, I heard him

murmuring, half to himself: "Those poor fellows."

The German machine gun operator, having probably escaped death in the air, must have had a hideous descent. Lufbery told us he had seen the whole thing, spiralling down after the German. He said he thought the German pilot must be a novice, judging from his manoeuvres. It occurred to me that he might have been making his first flight over the lines, doubtless full of enthusiasm about his career. Perhaps, dreaming of the Iron Cross and his Gretchen, he took a chance—and then swift death and a grave in the shell-strewn soil of Douaumont.

Generally the escadrille is relieved by another fighting unit after two hours over the lines. We turn homeward, and soon the hangars of our

field loom up in the distance. Sometimes I've been mighty glad to see them and not infrequently I've concluded the pleasantest part of flying is just after a good landing. Getting home after a sortie, we usually go into the rest tent, and talk over the morning's work. Then some of us lie down for a nap, while others play cards or read. After luncheon we go to the field again, and the man on guard gets his chance to eat. If the morning sortie has been an early one, we go up again about one o'clock in the afternoon. We are home again in two hours and after that two or three energetic pilots may make a third trip over the lines. The rest wait around ready to take the air if an enemy bombardment group ventures to visit our territory—as it has done more

than once over Bar-le-Duc. False alarms are plentiful, and we spend many hours aloft squinting at an empty sky.

PRINCE'S AËRIAL FIREWORKS

Now and then one of us will get ambitious to do something on his own account. Not long ago Norman Prince became obsessed with the idea of bringing down a German "sausage," as observation balloons are called. He had a special device mounted on his Nieuport for setting fire to the aërial frankfurters. Thus equipped he resembled an advance agent for Payne's fireworks more than an *aviateur de chasse*. Having carefully mapped the enemy "sausages," he would sally forth in hot pursuit whenever one was signalled at a re-

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We had made many friends amongst the townspeople and the French pilots stationed there, so the older members of the American unit were welcomed with open arms and their new comrades made to feel at home in the quaint Vosges town. It wasn't long, however, before the Americans and the British got together. At first there was a feeling of reserve on both sides but once acquainted they became fast friends. The naval pilots were quite representative of the United Kingdom hailing as they did from England, Canada, New South Wales, South Africa, and other parts of the Empire. Most of them were soldiers by profession. All were officers, but they were as democratic as it is possible to be. As a result there was a continuous exchange of



"WHISKEY"

The lion and mascot of the American flying squadron in France

CHAPTER III

PERSONAL LETTERS FROM SERGEANT
McCONNELL—AT THE FRONT

WE'RE still waiting for our machines. In the meantime the Boches sail gaily over and drop bombs. One of our drivers has been killed and five wounded so far but we'll put a stop to it soon. The machines have left and are due to-day.

You ask me what my work will be and how my machine is armed. First of all I mount an *avion de chasse* and am supposed to shoot down Boches or keep them away from over our lines. I do not do observation, or regulating of artillery fire. These are

handled by escadrilles equipped with bigger machines. I mount at day-break over the lines; stay at from 11,000 to 15,000 feet and wait for the sight of an enemy plane. It may be a bombardment machine, a regulator of fire, an observer, or an *avion de chasse* looking for me. Whatever she is I make for her and manoeuvre for position. All the machines carry different gun positions and one seeks the blind side. Having obtained the proper position one turns down or up, whichever the case may be, and, when within fifty yards, opens up with the machine gun. That is on the upper plane and it is sighted by a series of holes and cross webs. As one is passing at a terrific rate there is not time for many shots, so, unless wounded or one's machine is injured

by the first try—for the enemy plane shoots, too—one tries it again and again until there's nothing doing or the other fellow is dropped. Apart from work over the lines, which is comparatively calm, there is the job of convoying bombardment machines. That is the rotten task. The captain has called on us to act as guards on the next trip. You see we are like torpedo boats of the air with our swift machines.

We have the honour of being attached to a bombardment squadron that is the most famous in the French Army. The captain of the unit once lost his whole escadrille, and on the last trip eight lost their lives. It was a wonderful fight. The squadron was attacked by thirty-three Boches. Two French planes crashed to earth—then

two German; another German was set on fire and streaked down, followed by a streaming column of smoke. Another Frenchman fell; another German; and then a French lieutenant, mortally wounded and realizing that he was dying, plunged his airplane into a German below him and both fell to earth like stones.

The tours of Alsace and the Vosges that we have made, to look over possible landing places, were wonderful. I've never seen such ravishing sights, and in regarding the beauty of the country I have missed noting the landing places. The valleys are marvellous. On each side the mountain slopes are a solid mass of giant pines and down these avenues of green tumble myriads of glittering cascades which form into sparkling streams

beneath. It is a pleasant feeling to go into Alsace and realize that one is touring over country we have taken from the Germans. It's a treat to go by auto that way. In the air, you know, one feels detached from all below. It's a different world, that has no particular meaning, and besides, it all looks flat and of a weary pattern.

THE FIRST TRIP

Well, I've made my first trip over the lines and proved a few things to myself. First, I can stand high altitudes. I had never been higher than 7,000 feet before, nor had I flown more than an hour. On my trip to Germany I went to 14,000 feet and was in the air for two hours. I wore the fur head-to-foot combination they

give one and paper gloves under the fur ones you sent me. I was not cold. In a way it seemed amusing to be going out knowing as little as I do. My mitrailleuse had been mounted the night before. I had never fired it, nor did I know the country at all even though I'd motored along our lines. I followed the others or I surely should have been lost. I shall have to make special trips to study the land and be able to make it out from my map which I carry on board. For one thing the weather was hazy and clouds obscured the view.

We left en escadrille, at 30-second intervals, at 6:30 A.M. I'd been on guard since three, waiting for an enemy plane. I climbed to 3,500 feet in four minutes and so started off higher than the rest. I lost them

immediately but took a compass course in the direction we were headed. Clouds were below me and I could see the earth only in spots. Ahead was a great barrier of clouds and fog. It seemed like a limitless ocean. To the south the Alps jutted up through the clouds and glistened like icebergs in the morning sun. I began to feel completely lost. I was at 7,000 feet and that was all I knew. Suddenly I saw a little black speck pop out of a cloud to my left—then two others. They were our machines and from then on I never let them get out of my sight. I went to 14,000 in order to be able to keep them well in view below me. We went over Belfort which I recognized, and, turning, went toward the lines. The clouds had dispersed by this time. Alsace was

below us and in the distance I could see the straight course of the Rhine. It looked very small. I looked down and saw the trenches and when I next looked for our machines I saw clusters of smoke puffs. We were being fired at. One machine just under me seemed to be in the centre of a lot of shrapnel. The puffs were white, or black, or green, depending on the size of the shell used. It struck me as more amusing than anything else to watch the explosions and smoke. I thought of what a lot of money we were making the Germans spend. It is not often that they hit. The day before one of our machines had a part of the tail shot away and the propeller nicked, but that's just bum luck. Two shells went off just at my height and in a way that led me

to think that the third one would get me; but it didn't. It's hard even for the aviator to tell how far off they are. We went over Mulhouse and to the north. Then we sailed south and turned over the lines on the way home. I was very tired after the flight but it was because I was not used to it and it was a strain on me keeping a look-out for the others.

AT VERDUN

To-day the army moving picture outfit took pictures of us. We had a big show. Thirty bombardment planes went off like clock-work and we followed. We circled and swooped down by the camera. We were taken in groups, then individually, in flying togs, and God knows what-all. They will be shown in the States.

If you happen to see them you will recognize my machine by the MAC, painted on the side.

Seems quite an important thing to have one's own airplane with two mechanics to take care of it, to help one dress for flights, and to obey orders. A pilot of no matter what grade is like an officer in any other arm. We didn't see any Boche planes on our trip. We were too many. The only way to do is to sneak up on them.

I do not get a chance to see much of the biggest battle in the world which is being fought here, for I'm on a fighting machine and the sky is my province. We fly so high that ground details are lacking. Where the battle has raged there is a broad, browned band. It is a great strip of murdered Nature. Trees, houses, and

even roads have been blasted completely away. The shell holes are so numerous that they blend into one another and cannot be separately seen. It looks as if shells fell by the thousand every second. There are spurts of smoke at nearly every foot of the brown areas and a thick pall of mist covers it all. There are but holes where the trenches ran, and when one thinks of the poor devils crouching in their inadequate shelters under such a hurricane of flying metal, it increases one's respect for the staying powers of modern man. It's terrible to watch, and I feel sad every time I look down. The only shooting we hear is the tut-tut-tut of our own or enemy plane's machine guns when fighting is at close quarters. The Germans shoot explosive bullets from

theirs. I must admit that they have an excellent air fleet even if they do not fight decently.

I'm a sergeant now—*sergent* in French—and I get about two francs more a day and wear a gold band on my cap, which makes old territorials think I'm an officer and occasions salutes which are some bother.

A SORTIE

We made a foolish sortie this morning. Only five of us went, the others remaining in bed thinking the weather was too bad. It was. When at only 3,000 feet we hit a solid layer of clouds, and when we had passed through, we couldn't see anything but a shimmering field of white. Above were the bright sun and the blue sky, but how we were in re-

gard to the earth no one knew. Fortunately the clouds had a big hole in them at one point and the whole mass was moving toward the lines. By circling, climbing, and dropping we stayed above the hole, and, when over the trenches, worked into it, ready to fall on the Boches. It's a stunt they use, too. We finally found ourselves 20 kilometres in the German lines. In coming back I steered by compass and then when I thought I was near the field I dived and found myself not so far off, having the field in view. In the clouds it shakes terribly and one feels as if one were in a canoe on a rough sea.

VICTOR CHAPMAN

I was mighty sorry to see old Victor Chapman go. He was one of the

finest men I've ever known. He was *too* brave if anything. He was exceptionally well educated, had a fine brain, and a heart as big as a house. Why, on the day of his fatal trip, he had put oranges in his machine to take to Balsley who was lying wounded with an explosive bullet. He was going to land near the hospital after the sortie.

Received letter inclosing note from Chapman's father. I'm glad you wrote him. I feel sure that some of my letters never reach you. I never let more than a week go by without writing. Maybe I do not get all yours, either.

A SMASH-UP

Weather has been fine and we've been doing a lot of work. Our Lieu-

tenant de Laage de Mieux, brought down a Boche. I had another beautiful smash-up. Prince and I had stayed too long over the lines. Important day as an attack was going on. It was getting dark and we could see the tiny balls of fire the infantry light to show the low-flying observation machines their new positions. On my return, when I was over another aviation field, my motor broke. I made for field. In the darkness I couldn't judge my distance well, and went too far. At the edge of the field there were trees, and beyond, a deep cut where a road ran. I was skimming ground at a hundred miles an hour and heading for the trees. I saw soldiers running to be in at the finish and I thought to myself that James's hash was cooked, but I went

between two trees and ended up head on against the opposite bank of the road. My motor took the shock and my belt held me. As my tail went up it was cut in two by some very low 'phone wires. I wasn't even bruised. Took dinner with the officers there who gave me a car to go home in afterward.

FIGHTING A BOCHE

To-day I shared another chap's machine (Hill of Peekskill), and got it shot up for him. De Laage (our lieutenant) and I made a sortie at noon. When over the German lines, near *Côte 304*, I saw two Boches under me. I picked out the rear chap and dived. Fired a few shots and then tried to get under his tail and hit him from there. I missed, and bobbed up alongside of him. Fine for the

Boche, but rotten for me! I could see his gunner working the mitrailleuse for fair, and felt his bullets darn close. I dived, for I could not shoot from that position, and beat it. He kept plunking away and altogether put seven holes in my machine. One was only ten inches in from me. De Laage was too far off to get to the Boche and ruin him while I was amusing him.

Yesterday I motored up to an aviation camp to see a Boche machine that had been forced to land and was captured. On the way up I passed a cantonment of Senegalese. About twenty of 'em jumped up from the bench they were sitting on and gave me the hell of a salute. Thought I was a general because I was riding in a car, I guess. They're the blackest

niggers you ever saw. Good-looking soldiers. Can't stand shelling but they're good on the cold steel end of the game. The Boche machine was a beauty. Its motor is excellent and she carries a machine gun aft and one forward. Same kind of a machine I attacked to-day. The German pilots must be mighty cold-footed, for if the Frenchmen had airplanes like that they surely would raise the devil with the Boches.

As it is the Boches keep well within their lines, save occasionally, and we have to go over and fight them there.

KIFFIN ROCKWELL

Poor Kiffin Rockwell has been killed. He was known and admired far and wide, and he was accorded extraordinary honours. Fifty English

pilots and eight hundred aviation men from the British unit in the Vosges marched at his funeral. There was a regiment of Territorials and a battalion of Colonial troops in addition to the hundreds of French pilots and aviation men. Captain Thénault of the American Escadrille delivered an exceptionally eulogistic funeral oration. He spoke at length of Rockwell's ideals and his magnificent work. He told of his combats. "When Rockwell was on the lines," he said, "no German passed, but on the contrary was forced to seek a refuge on the ground."

Rockwell made the *esprit* of the escadrille, and the Captain voiced the sentiments of us all when, in announcing his death, he said: "The best and bravest of us all is no more."

How does the war look to you—as

regards duration? We are figuring on about ten more months, but then it may be ten more years. Of late things are much brighter and one can feel a certain elation in the air. Victory, before, was a sort of academic certainty; now, it's felt.