



Excursions

Into

Hunland

*Adventures in Boche-Hunting
Above the Clouds*

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Formerly of the 10th Canadian Battalion—a young aviator who, in a series of thrilling speeches, has astounded New York during the past three months. Lieut. Roberts, who was twenty-two months in the air in France, has lately taken to authorship. His first literary flight—a book on his adventures at the front—will be entitled "A Flying Fighter" and will be published immediately by Harper and Brothers. The material printed in the present article will be included.

MY first turn of service at the front as a pilot consisted of patrol work for three days running. It was an uneventful start. On the fourth day I went up again on patrol about three o'clock in the afternoon and got to 20,000 feet. I was looking for Huns up there but found none. Since it was very cold I decided to go down a way, and shut off my power.

At the level of 18,000 feet, I found myself sweeping along a very large peak of cloud. Intending to spoil its pretty formation I dived into it and coming out on the other side found myself alongside of a Hun plane of the Albatross type.

I HAD no intimation at all that a Hun was present, and I guess he was in the same position concerning me. I suppose he was as much surprised as I was when he saw me emerging from the cloud. That he was surprised was indicated by his failure to open fire upon me. Neither of us could shoot at the other for the reason that the guns of the machine we were flying were fixed to the plane, so that the machine itself has to be pointed at the enemy in order to fire. We were so close together that this could not be done without our ramming one another, which both of us had to avoid if we did not wish to crash to the earth together.

The Hun waved at me, and I waved at him. We found ourselves in a very peculiar situation. I was so close to him that I could see with the naked eye every detail of his machine. I could also see his face quite clearly.

There was something off in our position. I had to smile at the thought that we were so close together and yet dared not harm one another. The Hun also smiled. Then I reached down to feel the handle of my pressure reservoir to make sure that it was in its proper place; for I knew that one of us would soon have to make a break.

I had never before met a Hun at such close quarters in the air, and although we flew parallel to one another for only a few minutes, the time seemed like a week. I remembered some of the tactics told me by several of the older and best fighters of the corps, and was wondering how I could employ them.

FINALLY an idea occurred to me. Two machines flying at the same height are not necessarily on exactly the same level. I was flying between the Hun and his own lines, and had fuel for another hour and a quarter anyway. I wanted to make sure of this bird, but decided to play a waiting game. We continued our flight side by side.

After a while, however, much sooner than I expected, the Hun started to get restless and began to manoeuvre for position. Like myself he was utilizing the veriest fraction of every little opportunity in his endeavor to outmanoeuvre his antagonist. Finally, the Hun thought he had gotten the lead.

I noticed he was going down a little, evidently for the purpose of shooting me from underneath. I was not quite sure as yet that

such was really his intention; but the man was quick. Before I knew what had happened he had managed to put five shots into my machine. But all of them missed me.

I manoeuvred into an offensive position as quickly as I could, and before the Hun could fire again I had my machine gun pelting him. My judgment must have been fairly good. The Hun began to spin earthward. I followed to finish him, keeping in mind, meanwhile that it is an old game in flying to let the other man think you are hit. This bit of strategy will often afford the opportunity to get into a position that will give you the drop on your antagonist. The ruse is also sometimes used to get out of a fight when in trouble with gun jamb, or when bothered by a defective motor.

I discovered soon that this precaution was not necessary, for the Hun kept spinning right to the ground. He landed with a crash. A few minutes later I landed two fields away from the wreck, and ran over to see the kill I had made. I had hit the Hun about fifty times, and had nearly cut off both his legs at the hips.

There was nothing left in the line of souvenirs as the Tommies had gotten to the wreck before I did. I carried off a piece of his wing props, and had a stick made of it. That night we celebrated my first Hun brought down behind our own line since I had become a pilot.

Next day I went out to get another Hun to add to my collection. I was in the act of crossing the Hun lines when, bang! to the right of me came a thud, and my engine stopped. Revenge, I thought. I volplaned to the ground, made a good landing in a field, and then had another engine brought out to replace mine.

WHILE with this squadron I witnessed one of the greatest air fights I was privileged to see. It took place above the cemetery of P——. Three Huns were aloft behind their own lines, and back of them was a patrol of their own. The Hun does not believe in coming over our lines whenever he can help it, and generally he will manoeuvre so that our boys who go up to fight him have to follow him over to his own territory.

One of our men, named Price, was just coming in from patrol. He suddenly found himself at the same height as three Huns,—which I judged to be about 12,000 feet. Price was well behind the Hun lines when the enemy saw him, and all three made for him at once. I was at an artillery observation post at the time, visiting a pal, and was able to get a good view of the combat.

The foremost of the Huns made straight for Price, and for a minute it looked as though he intended ramming him. They separated and began to fire upon one another, as the tut-tut-tut of the machine guns, which was faintly audible, told me. Of a sudden the Hun volplaned, while another Hun made straight for Price.

I wondered what Price would do under the circumstances, but saw the next moment that he zoomed over the second Hun machine, which just then swooped upon him for attack. While Price was doing this, I noticed that the first Hun was falling to the ground, having either been killed by Price's machine gun or disabled.

Within a few seconds the second Hun also crashed to the ground, and the third was now making for home as fast as his motor would carry him, but Price caught up with him very shortly. It was an exciting race. Price was working his machine gun for all the thing was worth, and before long the third Hun dashed to the ground.

THE day following the fight I went out on another patrol. I rose up to about 15,000 feet and started across the lines. I had no trouble getting into Hunland. But the day was fairly clear and the Hun Archies were working overtime. I was about three miles behind the lines, when right ahead of me exploded a "woolly bear."

As soon as it had burst, my machine started to do a cake walk. I shut off power quickly and headed homeward, landing in an advance position of ours. (Continued on page 104)

I will admit that I already had the greatest respect for the Hun Archie batteries. The woolly bear they had fired at me was something new, and since it had certainly done damage enough to my machine it increased that respect.

But duty is duty. After I had attached the propeller I went up again, but shrunk six inches when the next woolly bear exploded quite close to me. I ducked into the cockpit, although one is no safer in the cockpit than outside. When the machine crashes to the ground, the cockpit is still a part of it, of course, so far no means having been devised to anchor that cockpit to a cloud. Although the bus I was flying was a fast one, that Hun Archie battery did most creditable work. I must say that much for the Hun, although I hate him like poison.

The Huns were good shots, even at the elevation at which I was flying, and which made my machine as seen from the ground no larger than a mosquito. I spent a very exciting day. The fire of the Hun Archies had never been as accurate as on that day, and those woolly bears seemed to have us all puzzled.

For all that, I had been lucky. When I returned to the aerodome it was merely to learn that old Pizz-doodle, a Scotch friend of mine, and as fine a boy as ever lived, had been brought down. Albert Ball, also of our squadron and the best pilot in the corps, perhaps, had likewise been shot down. The same fate had overtaken a number of others, many of whom I knew.

I spent a great deal of time that night wondering whether it would be my turn next. I remember looking over my medals and that peculiar mascot of mine, a Chinese doll. Life never seemed so uncertain or so short to me.

I had to wait next morning for quite some time before I received orders to go on patrol. Just before that I had learned that the King was coming to inspect our squadron, and I wondered whether I would have to hie myself into the blue just at the time when he would come. That was not to be the case, however.

Presently the King drove up in a car. We were lined and were looked over by the royal eye. The King shook hands with the commanding officer, chatted with him for awhile and then walked down our line. We were presented to him one by one, and the King had a kind word and a smile for every man.

After the King had addressed the man next to me, the wing commander told him that I was a Yankee, whereupon the King shook hands heartily with me and told me that he was proud of the Americans in the British service.

He asked me how I liked flying, and I told him that I had had no fair chance as yet, having been shot down only twice. The King laughed heartily, and told me that he had no fear for me, that I seemed quite able to take care of myself. He also remarked that it was his opinion that the United States of America would soon be doing good work and giving a good account of itself. Then he questioned me as to my length in the service and hoped that we would meet again.

WHEN the King had left our camp, I started out on my patrol with a feeling that something would happen that day. I was rather blue and made up my mind that if I could prevent it old Archie, back of that Hun line, was not going to get me. I went up to 20,000 feet that morning, but had hardly done so when I noticed that there was a fight going on across the Hun lines. Soon the shells were bursting all around us.

Before long a gang of our men was making for the scene of the fight, and gave the Hun Archies every chance to send up their woolly bears. The seventh shell that exploded near me sent a steel fragment into my carburetor. Of a sudden my motor slowed down and, as usual, I had visions of having to make a forced landing in Hunland. The piece of the shell in coming down had done considerable damage to the sides of the cockpit, and for a moment I feared that it had smashed some of my control. But that fear was ungrounded, as I presently discovered. My controls were still intact, and for that reason I would be able to glide to the ground.

I swung my machine into position for a glide toward our line, and before very long was at 10,000 feet with the Hun shells keeping close to my back. Some of them exploded a little ahead of me, which is always a bad sign for a descending man. It shows that the Archie gunners have a good line on the course of the dive, and every next shell may be the last the man in the machine sees. It was so on this day. The woolly bears continued to stand in my way, and I sped through their fumes nearly all the way down. To this day I do not understand how I managed to land, as I finally did in a convenient field.

The forced landings keep a man's nerve on edge. With the motor dead the pilot has lost 85% of his power to control the machine, and generally he reaches the ground at too great a speed to make a landing that will keep his machine intact.

On this landing I hit the ground at a speed of about 55 miles per hour, and had the misfortune of being thrown to one side by a bump on the ground which was struck by one of the wheels. The next instant the machine was on its nose; it turned over on its back and collapsed.

During the somersault I had the misfortune to stun myself by being thrown against the instrument board. The result was that I was bruised all over, had my lip cut, eyes blackened and my chin bruised quite badly. I was unable to get out of the wreckage, and still had the fear that the gasoline, which was spilling from the tanks, would ignite,—in which case I would have met the fate of many another pilot.

