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My Air Duels with the Boches

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Lufbery , G. R. (1918). *My Air Duels with the Boches*. .

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My Air Duels With the Boches

Lufbery Tells of Tangoing for Advantage and Fighting Until His Motor Was Mortally Wounded and His Stabilizer Disabled

By MAJOR RAOUL LUFBERY

The Sunday Post Magazine prints today another of Major Raoul Lufbery's own stories of his air flights on the western front, never before published. He is the New England flier who some time ago was credited with bringing down 17 German planes, and is still after them.

Lufbery has been awarded the French War Cross, with many citations; the Legion of Honor, and the Military Medal. Yet he is so modest he never speaks of these coveted military honors, and it was with difficulty he was prevailed upon to relate some of his most thrilling experiences for this magazine.

MY altimeter marked 2000. Beneath me was a marvelous panorama, the Vosges! For a moment the beauty of the landscape caused me to forget the object of my journey, the pursuit of the boches. In order better to enjoy the view I decided to make a slight detour to the left and to fly over the Ballon d'Alsace.

To the north of the mountain, down in a narrow valley, lay a tiny silver mirror, the lake of X—. I could not resist the temptation to remain there a few minutes to enjoy its beauty.

Gently I spiralled down in my Nieuport, trying in vain to glimpse its reflection in the tranquil water beneath.

I might have continued thus for several minutes, had not my motor suddenly attracted my attention by throwing out a discordant note. It was sufficient to arouse my fears. I listened attentively. It seemed to me to grow more and more irregular.

Visions of a treacherous breakdown, a precipitate landing on the borders of one of these precipices whose wild aspect I had admired but a minute before, floated before me. Instinctively I bore down on my accelerator. I was in haste to get away from these parts where I could expect no immediate assistance. But as I drew near to the plain my motor appeared to recover; its throbbing was now normal.

Probably it had intended to play me a nasty trick. Or was it I, the pilot, who had been the victim of an unpleasant illusion, or of a primitive feeling of fear? Somewhat ashamed, I called myself to order, reminding myself that any moment I might have to fight a boche.

As a tired horse that hangs its head after a fatiguing course, so my machine, then at a height of 4600 metres, of itself turned horizontal-wise, as if about to take a header. This meant that it had reached its maximum height.

Almost at my feet lay the great city of Mulhouse, while in a glade, a few kilometers to the right, was the German aviation field of X—.

A glance at my map showed that I had crossed the enemy lines without my having noticed it. It did not matter. Often this happens, especially when the network of trenches is as narrow as in these sectors where there is never an important engagement.

The wind was blowing strongly from the west to the east, a disadvantage to the aviator when flying in this region. I considered it prudent not to venture farther into the enemy's lines, but to turn my face northward. As I was about to do so, the artillerists of the Vaterland sent me a few shells, just to show me that they were not asleep. But their aim was bad and I decided it was not worth while to change either my direction or my altitude, which I do as a rule when I seek to avoid a more accurate fire.

My attention was drawn to a mountain top that differed from other summits in that it was of a brick-red color. It was the Hartmannswillerkopf, rendered famous by the heroic defence of the Alpine troops of France. Here, as at Verdun, the enemy's way is barred.

A semi-turn to the right, another to the left, and I was able to get a periscopic view of my surroundings. I discovered nothing abnormal and reassured I continued on my way.

As I approached the Hartmannswillerkopf I



First photograph of Major Lufbery, the daring American flyer, in his new United States Army uniform. It was taken in Paris. (C) International Film Service.

tried to recall where I had already seen the picture beneath me. I remembered. It was in the photographs of the moon. Yes, the moon, in its most uneven parts. Burrowed by shells, the summit of the Hartmannswillerkopf stands out in a striking manner from the verdant tops of the surrounding mountains.

Again I glanced in all directions, and this time not in vain. Above me and somewhat to the rear was a small biplane, of the Fokker, or Halberstadt type. A glance showed me that it was alone. I was surprised at this, as it was the first time I had seen a machine of this type place itself at a disadvantage for a fight. A ruse, perhaps. One never knows. Or maybe my adversary was a novice, with more courage than caution, whose ambition it was to become an "ace" of the Vaterland.

The wind continued to blow westward, carrying me farther and farther into the enemy's lines. It would not do to allow the Boche to take advantage of my position. I decided to start the attack without further delay.

I faced about and brusquely made a double turn, thus placing myself a little behind my foe. Profiting by this position, I opened my gun on him, but with remarkable skill he succeeded in getting out of my range. He had foreseen my maneuver and parried the blow. I was now convinced that I was face to face with a virtuoso. His first move was proof of this.

As I tangoed from left to right, I saw him once more above me, but about 40 metres nearer. Suddenly he reared his machine, as if to loop the loop, and in this perilous position let fly a volley of bullets at me, which I evaded by a semi-turn to the right.

A second time I attacked, but again without success.

The wind had carried us both north of Mulhouse, and I was beginning to wonder if I was not playing into my adversary's hands by delaying longer with him.

By chance I turned my eyes in the direction of Belfort, some 20 kilometres within our lines. There, in the air, I perceived some small white flakes, an indication of the presence of the Boches.

Here was my opportunity. I had now an excuse for honorably abandoning the match, and I admit that I was not sorry. Only, before leaving my adversary, I wished to show him that I respected his valor. I waved to him a sign of adieu. He understood, and with equal courtesy returned my salute.

I then turned my entire attention to that which I considered new prey. It was a large, white biplane. I drew nearer to it. What luck! For the first time in my flying career I was to have an opportunity of meeting my adversary within our own lines. This increased my confidence to such an extent that I forgot all prudence, or even tactical science.

I had another motive for being more reckless than usual. I was determined that he should not escape me. I would make it a point of honor to fire at him until a final victory. If only I could lodge a bullet in his motor or gasoline tank and thus force him to land on French territory! Then I would have the satisfaction of talking to my captive, getting his impressions of the aerial duel between us.

Then, too, there would be the trophies, the trophies which would be mine by right of conquest, viz., my adversary's compass, altimeter, etc.

There is an old proverb which says that one should not count one's chickens before they are hatched. That day, as will be seen, I had occasion to verify the truth of it.

My time for dreams was over. It was now the moment to act. Quickly I placed myself behind my adversary, who was some 50 metres distant from me. I then opened fire and continued to fire until my machine, which is superior in speed, came so near to the biplane that I thought it impossible to avoid a collision.

Brusquely I changed my direction, rose in the air and leaped over the foe, gliding down on my right wing to my former height. Increasing my speed, I recovered my balance and sought to try my luck a second time. But this was impossible. My motor, the soul of my aeroplane, was mortally wounded and about to breathe its last.

I turned to find the stabilizer also seriously damaged. My enemy appeared not to want to take advantage of the situation. He continued his flight in the direction of his lines. Perhaps he, too, was in a critical condition. I hoped so.

In any case his flight left me master of the field. That was some consolation. But it was of short duration, for my machine began rapidly to descend.

Finally I reached the aviation field. Pilots, observers and mechanics came up to question me. They had witnessed the combat and were eager for details.

But for the moment I could explain little more than that I had encountered a Boche who could not understand a joke. I was anxious to examine the wounds of my baby Nieuport. I found it badly damaged.

Three bullets in its motor, its gasoline tank smashed, part of its fuselage out of commission, several holes in its hood and the left side of the stabilizer cut and torn by bullets.

Poor "baby!" In accord with my mechanics I decided it was irreparable. It had flown its last flight and its days of combat were over.

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Brave Italian Sergeant Stops German Auto and Kills General

A tale of daring that is rarely equalled is told of in an exploit of Sergeant G. Morini of the Italian Bersaglieri.

While on patrol he stopped a German motorcar carrying General von Berrer, an adjutant and two chauffeurs. He killed the general with the first shot and put the soldier-chauffeurs to flight.

The adjutant, a German captain, he captured after a struggle, and turned him over to the nearest Italian command, and then joined his cycle patrol for further rear-guard action. He was wounded later and sent to a hospital in Milan.

His most extraordinary and daring feat took place at the gates of Udine during the Italian retreat to the Piave