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Havoc From the Heavens: The Contribution of British Air Power to the Destruction of Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Turkish Forces in 1918 Through the Eyes of British War Artist Lieutenant Sydney Carline (1888-1929) RAF.

'Havoc from the Heavens' – this from a letter early in November 1918 from Sydney Carline in Italy to his younger brother Richard serving with the RAF in France. Sydney was trying to encapsulate what the RAF in Italy had just the previous week inflicted on retreating Austro-Hungarian forces on the ground.. Sydney was never the most lyrical or expressive wordsmith but he described what he had participated in, as a rear gunner and war artist flying in a Bristol fighter, as the 'epitome of modern war ... organised, mechanised murder' which he asserted had been 'cruel but absolutely necessary.' He had been privileged to see: 'an Empire falling apart before my very eyes.' After the 'thrashing' the Austro-Hungarians had received between the rivers Piave and Tagliamento he could not imagine their Empire lasting much longer. Indeed, by the time he wrote these words the AH Empire had ceased to exist.

Carline's Background:

Born 1888 in Oxford; father was established academic painter George Carline. Came from a family of artists. Mother Annie, younger sister Nancy and younger brother Richard were all painters. Elder brother George studies anthropology at Oxford.

Young Sydney studied at Oxford Preparatory School and revealed a talent for drawing. Then a pupil at Repton Public School in Derbyshire (1901-1904), last two years won the School Drawing Prize.

Worked in an Estate Office as a draughtsman and tried his hand at being a cartoonist – a 'Black and White' artist between 1905 and 1907. He made enough money to study at the prestigious Slade School of Art from October 1907 to June 1910. Effectively funded his studies by winning grants and prizes at the Slade every year.

Sydney's approach to art transformed by meeting UCL art historian Roger Fry (1866-1934); he was bowled over by visiting the famous First Post-Impressionist Art Exhibition in London in October 1910 which had in part been curated by Fry. Sydney henceforth was within Fry's orbit but on the fringes of the Bloomsbury Group.

Spent a year to 18 months studying in Paris at an art school run by Percival Tudor-Hart. In his sketch books for 1913-14 can detect first signs of interest in the air/flight: two drawings of airships preparing to take off.

Sydney returned to the family home on Downshire Hill, Hampstead in spring of 1914. Found employment as an art master at a minor public school in Lancashire. On his summer holidays from there when Britain declared war on Germany. Family was

divided over the war, Annie and Nancy inclined towards pacifism; father and elder brother George greatly admired German culture. Younger brother Richard thought he would have to get involved but was in no hurry to volunteer. Sydney had a tendency to be a little lazy sometimes and to allow matters to drift.

He was politically probably the most conservative of the Carlines – never openly critical of the British Empire as his parents and siblings could be on occasion. Summer 1915 he surprised his family by resigning from his position as a school master, buying a second motor-bike and taking a mechanics course with an aim to volunteer as an army despatch rider. He apparently revelled in feeling of speed as he drove down Haverstock Hill at a 'reckless velocity' according to his father.

December 1915: he volunteered for the Army in the closing days of the Derby Scheme. Then a contact he made through Roger Fry, Churchill's Secretary Edward Marsh, introduced him to writer, lawyer and biographer of American painter John Singer Sargent the Hon Evan Charteris (1864-1940) who was also a staff captain with the RFC in London. He suggested Sydney think of volunteering to become a fighter pilot (interesting was that he set his heart on doing that right from their first meeting early in March 1916).

Sydney began his flight training early in May 1916, on Maurice Farnan Shorthorns and then Avro 504's. He was awarded his wings late in July 1916 after accumulating just over 21 hours of solo flying. Early in August 1916 he was posted to No 19 Squadron equipped with BE12 fighter-bombers flying missions in support of British infantry over the Somme battlefield. Now he could boast over 36 hours solo flying experience. Early on 31 August 1916 Sydney flew his third mission, a bombing raid on German positions in Hautevilliers Wood. He dropped his bombs and flying back to the British lines was distracted by the beauty of the sunrise. He had allowed his concentration to wander – proved an almost fatal mistake. He was jumped from the sun by three German Roland fighters. Sydney was an above average pilot, even flying an obsolete death trap such as the BE12. He managed to outfly and evade two of his attackers but machine gun bullets from the third hit his machine – one of them slammed into his left upper thigh. He crash landed behind British lines and managed to stagger away from the wreckage. Miraculous he did not go up in smoke despite being soaked in petrol from a ruptured petrol tank when his stricken machine did blow up. He crawled about 50 feet from the crash before he fainted from loss of blood.

Within 24 hours he had been evacuated to a hospital in England, in Kent where he remained for two and a half months until early November 1916. Then a Medical Board passed him as fit early in January 1917 for Home Service only. Sydney was then posted to a Reserve Squadron where he flew a variety of aircraft camouflaged by his old art teacher Percival Tudor-Hart – now advising a somewhat sceptical RFC about the merits of various innovative camouflage schemes.

Early in October 1917 Sydney was reassigned to a Reserve Squadron to learn to fly the fearsome Sopwith Camel – a design so tricky to fly it killed more British pilots than German fighters ever did. It was inherently unstable but in the hands of a skilled pilot proved superb for dogfighting. He was a good pilot and took to flying a Camel with aplomb. So much so early in December 1917 he was temporarily posted to fly in an extremely hazardous night fighter role, stalking Gotha G IV bombers making nocturnal raids on London and the South East of England. Sydney flew a dozen missions but never saw a Gotha and was amazed he never crashed.

Elsewhere on 24 October 1917 7 German and 26 Austro-Hungarian Divisions attacked the Italian Army at the northern end of the Gorizia Front at Caporetto (now Kobarid in Slovenia). Within 24 hours three Italian armies were in full retreat westwards. By mid-November 1917 they had fallen back 70 miles and formed a defensive position along the west bank of the River Piave. The Central Powers were now less than 20 miles from St. Mark's Square in Venice.

The Italian Government made impassioned pleas to the British and French for military help. By the beginning of December 1917 the French sent six infantry divisions and the British five (that's around 120,000 men including supporting arms – artillery, engineers, transport etc). The commander of the British Italian Expeditionary Force, General Sir Herbert Plumer, insisted he had adequate air support – he arrived at his HQ in northern Italy to find the skies above dominated by German and AH aircraft. He was initially provided with five RFC squadrons: three of Fighters (28th, 45th and 66th equipped with Sopwith Camels) and two RE8 Recon and Bombing squadrons (34th and 42nd). This came to a total of about 90 aircraft.

Towards the end of March Plumer returned to France to command the Second Army in Flanders and his place as C-in-C of the IEF was taken by an intelligent and forceful Anglo-Irish aristocrat highly thought of by Haig: General Sir Frederick Lambert, 10th Earl of Cavan. He was even keener on air power than Plumer had been. The departing Plumer was accompanied by one squadron of Camels (45th) and one of RE8's (42nd). However, Cavan insisted he be given in return a squadron of versatile Bristol Fighters – 139th. By April 1918 the new RAF in northern Italy had a strength of 70 effective aircraft.

As for Stanley, in mid February 1918 he was posted away from fruitlessly chasing Gotha Bombers and sent to 28th Squadron based at a rudimentary airstrip north-east of Vicenza. He settled into a routine of flying escort missions for RE8's taking photographs of enemy positions and also forward patrols looking for the enemy to the attack. The Squadron CO made it clear, their task was to dominate the airspace as British troops on the Western Front habitually sought to dominate the no-man's land in front of their trenches. Sydney was flying two to three missions a day each mission lasting 1.5 to 2 hours. As he wrote to his younger brother Richard in March 1918 he found flying at 20,000 feet 'rather took it out of you.' He made light of heavy enemy anti-aircraft fire but concealed the fact his machine was hit twice by AH guns

(judged to be as good if not better than Germans in France) 'Till just recently things have been very quiet, except for the usual plodding through Archie bursts which is not too nice. I have had several bits of archie through my machine but nothing at all serious. I am thinking of doing a picture of the subject ...' [19 March 1918].

What he did not mention was that as a result of being hit, he had twice crashed trying to land his Camel.

He did not see much of the Imperial Austrian Air Service but during one patrol early in March 1918 he did administer the coup de grace to an AH recon aircraft which he had attacked with two other members of his squadron. He wrote to his brother with rather chilling clinical detachment of the event:

'On patrol with two others I saw a Hun two-seater taking photos 5,000 ft below us (we at 10,000) and on our side of the line. We dived on him. He put up no show, the pilot was shot and the observer leaning over tried to dive for home but he was also shot and the machine crashed in the river ... there was a patrol of six or so enemy scouts at about 15,000 ft supposed to be escorting it and as soon as they saw us go for him they apparently turned for home and their aerodrome but ran into three of our machines and only three of their men arrived home.' [5 March 1918]

Clear that the enemy Albatross was shot down over the Piave. However, when Sydney came to paint the incident in late September 1918 he depicted the enemy craft being attacked over the Valley of the Brenta which the artist thought more atmospheric with their 'Dantean' overtones.

In April 1918 he managed to outfly five AH machines when he was abandoned by mistake by his wingman as part of a two-plane patrol. After the incident he wrote to his brother Richard: 'We have been doing two machine patrols lately and this morning I took a new fellow up. On the lines we met 6 Italian machines. He of course thought I was one of them and followed them and properly lost me. So I did the patrol by myself ... When I saw 5 Hun machines come up from behind the hills quite close, I got between them and the sun ... they went off along the mountains ... We saw them again this afternoon and I managed to bag one!!' [This was his second confirmed kill – in July he would be credited a third].

Mid April 1918 the Squadron MO judged Sydney needed a rest and he was posted to 7th Air Park, to test fly Camels sent out from England – some of which were to be eventually handed over to Italian pilots. The move was also a sign of how well respected Sydney was a pilot – only the best British ones were assigned to show off the Camel to the Italians. It was also a curious form of 'rest'; it was certainly no sinecure – on one occasion a part of the cockpit which had not been properly attached in England suddenly broke away while Sydney was in flight. A chunk hit him and temporarily knocked Sydney out at 10,000 ft, he came round in a spin having lost over 5,000 feet. He was able to regain control of the aircraft and give Italian villagers watching below an impromptu acrobatic display. On another occasion the

engine of his Camel recently arrived from England suddenly stopped dead at 5,000 feet and Sydney managed to make a controlled crash landing, though narrowly missing a mountain side when blown by a sudden violent thermal.

Pressed back into combat mid June 1918 when the Austro-Hungarians launched a huge offensive across the Piave (they referred to it as The Battle of the Solstice, 15-24 June). The Italians resisted fiercely but were forced to give ground in places. The Earl of Cavan ordered all his fighters to attempt to stem the AH advance by 'bullet and bomb' – the extremely hazardous business of ground strafing. Sydney only flew about seven such missions over the week the offensive lasted but as he wrote at the time to his brother he felt he had 'aged by over fifty years.' The AH had advanced with batteries of machine guns set to fire against aircraft. Sydney found it 'particularly wearing on the nerves' to fly directly into what appeared to be a solid wall of tracer fire. He was 'simply amazed ... to still be alive.' However, there was no doubt they had 'put the wind up brother Hun.' [Sydney seems to have regarded his AH opponents as a breed of overly casual Germans].

Towards the end of July Sydney's appointment came through to be a British official war artist attached to the IEF specifically tasked with recording the heroic deeds of the newly minted RAF; his brother had been working as an official artist attached to the RAF in northern France since late April. Both now reported to the formidable Lt. Col A.C. Maclean who possessed a definite flair for what would be called a decade later 'public relations.' More to the point he had the ear of the 'Father of the RAF' and Chief of the Air Staff Sir Hugh 'Boom' Trenchard who was absolutely determined that the RAF's contribution to the war effort would be prominently represented in the nations collection of war art. No coincidence that Sydney's appointment was welcomed by one of Boom Trenchard's proteges who commanded the RAF's 14th Wing in Italy, its main fighting formation in the country by the time Sydney took up his war artist duties.

He found a studio in Vicenza, was equipped with a motorcycle and side car (to hold his palette and easel and paints). By late August 1918 a Camel from 28th Squadron was set aside for him to fly over the front looking for suitable subjects. He always with twin machine guns fully armed and it would seem on at least two occasions he attacked AH aircraft when he was supposed to be making sketches for official commissions (he already knew it was extremely difficult to make pencil or charcoal sketches while trying to fly his Camel with his knees; even when he tried working from the Observers seat of a Bristol Fighter of 139 Squadron he found the water in his watercolours froze – it was no fun he remarked early in October 1918 to his brother trying to defrost a watercolour at 15,000 or 20,000 feet and then dodging dagger-sharp particles of ice flying off the surface of his drawing board.

Flying with 139 Squadron, in the rear seat of a Bristol fighter, he was expected to fight as well as sketch. When he attacked across the Piave on 26 October 1918 as Commander of the 10th Anglo-Italian Army (comprising two British Divisions: the 7th

and 23rd and two Italian Divisions), Cavan was determined the RAF would have complete control of the air above his men. Also made clear after 48 hours as the AH's began to retreat to the River Monticano, they should be dogged at every step by the 4 RAF squadrons available to him. By 30 October the Austro-Hungarians had abandoned their last coherent defence line to the British and were in full rout. Over the next four days columns of AH troops 4-5 miles long fleeing eastwards were repeatedly attacked by RAF Sopwith Camels and the Bristol Fighters of 139 Jamaica Squadron. Sydney took part in at least one raid on the important AH airbase at Sacile by camels of 28th Squadron and as many as four missions with the 139th, alternating between sketching from the Observers seat and then firing on AH soldiers below on the road to Udine with a Lewis Gun.

At 3.20 pm on 3 November 1918 the AH's signed an Armistice with the Italians, British and French representatives. However, the armistice would not come into force until 3pm the following day. Up to that time the remnants of AH Army of Italy were trying to seek refuge in what had been AH territory but was now in the process of becoming entirely new countries – Austria and Yugoslavia – were being mercilessly attacked from the air. It was only now the Royal Italian Air Force joined in – hitherto their fighters had rather taken the view that ground strafing was somewhat beneath them and not conduct worthy of a gentleman. Its pilots were somewhat taken aback by the zest with which the RAF seemed to ceaselessly pound the retreating enemy. Indeed the official history Volume VI of *War in the Air* later stated that between 27 October and noon 4 November 1918 that Nos 28, 66 and 139 Squadrons RAF (the two camel units plus the Brisfits) had dropped 20,000 lbs of bombs and fired over 50,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition at the AH enemy (nearly 37,000 AH soldiers were killed between 26 October and 3 November 1918). This for a loss of seven aircraft while a further seven were seriously damaged.

On the last strafing mission Sydney participated in with 139 Squadron, his pilot was hit by AH anti-aircraft fire. He just managed to fly back to base and land safely before passing out through loss of blood – Sydney later sketched the moment as his pilot was helped out of the cockpit of his 'well-riddled' Brisfit. Sydney was not oblivious to the fact that losses of British pilots and aircraft rose significantly once ground attack missions were made the overriding priority.

Shortly after the Armistice of 4 November Sydney fell ill from Spanish 'Flu and nearly died from it. He had recovered by late November and returned to London. However, his work as an official war artist for the RAF was by no means over. Lt-Col Maclean, of the Air Sub-Committee of the Ministry of Information, had been promoted (to Brigadier-General) and this appears to have inspired him to devise a further campaign to visually promote the efforts of RAF in the war. Sydney and his brother Richard were commissioned to tour battlefield of the Middle East where the RFC and RAF had distinguished themselves. They were to start in Palestine and then move to Mesopotamia (soon to be renamed Iraq), followed by Persia, Gallipoli and Salonika.

Sydney and Richard departed London for Port Said early in January 1919. Lt-Col Maclean by now had recruited more artists – he seems to have been suffering from delusions of grandeur. He was spending freely, funds which had not technically been authorised by either the Ministry of Information (about to be wound up) and the Air Council (very much aware the Treasury would very soon be screaming for spending cuts).

Sydney and Richard arrived in Egypt and were made to feel most welcome by the RAF's senior officer in the region – Major-General Sir Geoffrey Salmond who had commanded the EEF's air component in 1917-18 and earned the respect of the EEF's fearsome and formidable commander General Sir Edmund 'The Bull' Allenby who just as much as Cavan in Italy had displayed a keen appreciation of the utility of airpower over the modern battlefield.

When Allenby launched his final offensive to destroy the three Ottoman Armies in Palestine late in September 1918, he seems to have regarded his air support as a form of aerial cavalry – more implacable than the four cavalry divisions he had at his disposal in tirelessly pursuing a broken, fleeing enemy. In September 1918 Salmond was able to provide Allenby with the considerable firepower of seven RAF squadrons: 3 equipped with RE8's (14th; 113th and 142nd); one with DH9's (144th); two with SE5a's (111th and 145th) and the buccaneering 1st Royal Australian Squadron flying Bristol Fighters.

By early February 1919 Sydney and Richard had reached Ramleh and were attached to 1st RAAF. Sydney took about three flights over areas the Squadron had been in action in late September 1918, relentlessly bombing and strafing Ottoman troops from their 7th Army as they streamed eastwards from the vicinity of Nablus towards the illusionary safety of the River Jordan and beyond.

The 1st RAAF had participated on 20 September in air attacks on Ottoman troops trying to escape from Tul Karem (HQ of their 8th Army). Later estimated over 30,000 machine gun rounds had been fired at the luckless Turks and over 300 20 and 25lb bombs had been dropped on them. Ottoman forces in the area were left so traumatised that some 7,000 survivors with 100 guns surrendered to advancing ANZAC and Indian cavalry units.

Sydney flew over the Wadi Fara, east of Nablus where on 21 September fleeing Ottoman troops from its shattered 7th Army were caught by the Brisfits of 1st RAAF (carrying 8 20 lb bombs each) and SE5a's of 111th and 145th Squadrons (each SE5a could carry 4 20lb bombs. The first strafing mission was delivered about 11am and attacks continued until darkness fell. The official history of the RAF later estimated that the Ottoman forces were attacked 172 times by all seven available squadrons of the RAF – though the majority of attacks were delivered by four: 1st RAAF; the two SE5a Squadrons (111th and 145th) and 144th with DH9 bombers. Nearly 100 hundred aircraft were involved, no opposition was noted from either German or Ottoman

aircraft. The RAF dropped nearly 10 tons of bombs that day and fired 56,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition. The following morning the 4th Indian Cavalry Division when it reached the Wadi counted among the piles of wrecked and abandoned objects: 100 artillery pieces; 837 4-wheeled carts; 75 2-wheeled carts 55 motor lorries; 20 field kitchens and watercarts and 4 staff cars. The dead lay in piles, in places three or four men deep. In April 1919 Sydney was to refer to the Wadi as 'the Valley of Death', somewhere he could not think of 'without a shudder.'

Sydney made several sketches flying over the Wadi Fara, noting in his diary: 'It was a dreary, torturous place' in which the Turks had been 'easily stopped and massacred by aeroplanes ... 'All along [the Wadi floor] were the debris of overturned carts and motors and ... the skeletons of horses and even men, their bones picked white by the jackels.'

Later in February he and his brother moved into northern Palestine by the border with Lebanon and explored the Wadi Baroda an area west of Damascus where another retreating Ottoman column, trying to find safety within the city were 'caught and massacred' from the air by relays of aircraft from: 1st RAAF (Brisfits); 14th, 113th (Both RE8s) and 144th Squadrons (latter flying DH9's. Sydney reflected in his diary that he could almost feel pity for the Turks and yet he had been in exactly same position as their attackers, he had fired on 'the defenceless ... feeling a god-like invincibility.' He also noted his hosts at 1st RAAF had not just devoted themselves to bombing the enemy, they had dropped ammunition and food to forward British and Dominion troops – even information as to the whereabouts of remaining manned Ottoman defences in front of them.

By mid March 1919 Sydney and his brother were in southern Lebanon, both feeling ill from malaria. On evening of 18 March Sydney noted in his diary having driven to the former important Ottoman airbase of Rayak earlier in the day. 'I found the remains of the Turkish aircraft park which had been badly bombed together with the adjoining large ammunition dump and close to the Railway junction. When the Turks left the place, in a hurry, they burnt what remained ...left behind were 30 gaunt carcasses of aeroplanes, some standing on their noses and others in all kinds of positions amid all manner of rubbish ...'

The next morning he was back at Rayak, 'making sketches with a view to painting a future work. Royal Engineers were blowing up discarded live ordinance – the former ammo dump was regularly raided by Brigands. In fact there had recently been a raid during which 'forty brigands were killed. The chief of the band was famous for having withstood in his mountain fastnesses all attempts of the Turks to capture him and his party.' The talk among Sydney's hosts at 111th Squadron was that it would soon be earning its keep by rooting out this 'troublesome brigand chief' and his followers in the hills – the irony was noted though that this came bandit had taken the side of the EEF as its forces advanced into southern Lebanon early in October 1918.

Sydney and Richard left Palestine for Mesopotamia early in April 1919. However, such was the problem in acquiring transport, even with the enthusiastic backing of General Salmond, they did not reach Basra via Bombay and Karachi until late June 1919. After exploring Baghdad by mid July 1919 they had reached Mosul and Kirkuk. Richard was ill from 'sand fever'. Sydney took part as 'armed observer' in three to four missions by DH9's and Bristol Fighters against rebellious Kurds – he had chanced upon one of the earliest known experiments in what would become known as the RAF's policy in the middle East of 'Air Control'. The use of air power to suppress mobile populations of recalcitrant, rebellious tribesmen, to induce them by bombing and strafing of themselves and of their livestock to lay down their arms and come to an accommodation with the Mandated British authorities. In June-July 1919 the RAF was deployed to bomb the Kurds into persuading them that they did not want their own state but could be a part of a new country – the kingdom of Iraq (formally proclaimed in August 1921).

'Air Control' played a key role in the RAF's continued survival after WW; Trenchard essentially sold the efficacy of the policy to Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill at the Cairo Conference of March 1921 (Winston had shown himself to be a devotee of air power in 1919 in Russia against the Bolshevik Red Army and against Irish and Indian Nationalists while Secretary of State for War from 1919-21).

Meanwhile, Sydney and Richard's Middle Eastern RAF-funded odyssey abruptly came to an end in mid August 1919. The Air Council discovered just how much Brigadier Maclean had been spending on art. He was 'moved sideways' and replaced by an Air Commodore Lambe – Director of Equipment and the Air Section's new Chairman. By mid October 1919 the Carlines were back in London. Before they were officially demobilised Lambe frostily informed them that though Maclean had led them to believe he would be purchasing as many as fifty works each from them; this would now be reduced to four. In addition he did not approve of Sydney indulging himself in producing designs full of 'atmosphere' at the expense of accuracy when it came to depicting aircraft and technology.

Early in 1920 he was to remind Sydney and Richard, as they painted up the full-sized works commissioned from them by the RAF from their many preparatory sketches that: 'the RAF section is not prepared to exhibit in the [Imperial War] Museum, pictures showing any extreme forms of art. It should be borne in mind that only true records, faithfully depicting places, incidents etc will be accepted. All extremes should be carefully avoided, it being essential not to overlook the fact that the impression of one individual may seriously clash with the impressions of others. With the photographs at your disposal you should be able to produce absolutely correct records of the various place selected for your pictures. A point which has been criticised by flying people visiting the Royal Academy is the dubious appearance of anti-aircraft smoke in those pictures by SW Carline ...a hardness and unnatural formation.' [Lambe to the Carlines at 47 Downshire Hill, 6 February 1920].

The reference to the Royal Academy is connected with the exhibition organised by the IWM 'The Nations War Pictures' and held December 1919-February 1920 at Burlington House. Sydney and Richard exhibited 11 works each in this show; Sydney's images from Italy were singled out for particular praise by the critics.

The two would hold a successful joint exhibition at the Gallery in March 1920. Their images created for the RAF in 1918-19 established them as: 'artists of original talent, modern in ... outlook.' One particular admirer of Sydney's aerial wartime paintings was TE Lawrence, by 1925 calling himself TE Shaw. He insisted Sydney's painting of *The Destruction of the Turkish Transport in the Gorge of the Wadi Fara* be included among the illustrations for the luxury Subscribers edition of his literary epic about the Arab Revolt *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (published in December 1926). By the spring of 1925 Lawrence was an Aircraftman 2nd Class in the RAF.

Before his untimely death from pneumonia in February 1929 aged 40, Sydney often reflected that flying and then painting for the RAF had been the making of him as an artist. The fact he could genuinely claim an impressive war record had stood him in excellent stead and helped ease his appointment in January 1922 as the Ruskin School of Art's youngest head of drawing. He married in April 1928; his widow who survived him by almost forty years in later life recalled that Sydney had not been able to forget many 'terrible things' he had seen in the war and there would be a price to be paid for having flown for his country as an 'angel of death.'