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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, not previously published. He is the New England hero who some time ago was credited with bringing down 47 German planes, and is still after that number.

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 adapt my view I decided to make a slight detour to the left and to fly over the Balles d'Aluce.

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 a gentle curve, observing the reflection in the glassy 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 rouse me from the bewitching atmosphere of the lake. 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 little while ago, one might call it a victim of an unpleasant illusion, or of a primitive feeling of fear? Somewhat ashamed, I called myself to order and faced the reality of my situation. I had not my motor suddenly attracted my attention, but a semi-turn to the right, another to the left, more above me, but about 40 meters nearer. Suddenly I saw him, or thought I saw him, and convinced myself that it was the enemy's way barred. As I tangoed from right to left, I saw him once more above me, but about 40 meters nearer. Suddenly he reared his motor as if to loop the loop, and in this perilous position left 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 playing into my adversary's hands by delaying longer with him.

By chance I turned my eyes in the direction of the horizon, some 20 kilometers within our lines. There, in the air I perceived some white flakes, an indication of the presence of the Boches. There was my opportunity, 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 salutation.

I then turned my entire attention to that which interested me most. In a few minutes I had considered new prey. It was a small biplane. I drew nearer to it. What luck! For the first time in my flying career I was to have an opportunity of putting my adrenalin to test on my 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 knock out his motor: to his motor an adversary would not only render him harmless, but 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.

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Almost at my feet lay the great city of Mulhouse, while in the distance, 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 natural conditions are as favorable to me as 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 until the wind should turn my nose northward. As I was about to do so, the artillery and the Vaterland sent me a signal, which I could not accept. They seemed 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 adversary was now at a distance of 4000 meters, of itself turned horizontal-wise, as if he wished the Vaterland to avoid a collision.

As a tried horse that hangs its head after a fatiguing run, so my machine, then at a height of 4000 meters, of itself turned horizontal-wise, as if it wished the Vaterland to avoid a collision. Probably it had intended to play me a nasty trick, but I did not yield to the temptation to remain there a few minutes to enjoy its beauty. Gently I spiralled down in a gentle curve, observing the reflection in the glassy water beneath.

It is true that 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 rouse me from the bewitching atmosphere of the lake. It seemed to me to grow more and more irregular.

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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 loss of the stabilizer cut and torn by bullets.

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