

KENNETH WARD

THE BOY VOLUNTEERS
WITH THE FRENCH
AIRMEN

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**The Boy Volunteers
with the French Airmen**

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CHAPTER I

ANTWERP AND THE FLIGHT

THROUGH NORTHERN BELGIUM

Antwerp was in a fever of excitement, as Ralph and Alfred marched up from the quay with the Belgian troops, and rumors of an immediate attack on the city were flying about.

"Look at the Zeppelin!" cried out a voice.

The boys turned to follow the gaze of the people who lined the streets. There, almost directly west, they caught the first glimpse of one of the monsters which appeared to be moving south, far beyond the reach of the encircling forts, but plainly visible.

"Nothing would suit me better than a trip in a flying machine!" exclaimed Alfred.

"Wouldn't that be fine?" replied Ralph.

The sight seemed to be an inspiration to the boys. Our story will tell how the idea so impressed itself on their minds that they almost felt it a duty to join a flying corps. That, however, seemed to be an impossibility.

They had passed through Belgium, participated in the first battles of the war, had been captured, and escaped from the Germans, and had now reached Antwerp, with the retreating Belgian army, where Ralph had hoped to meet his father, whom they had left in Germany almost four weeks prior to that time.

As the father had not arrived, owing to the embargo which had been placed on all travelers from Germany to the warring countries, the boys found themselves stranded in a strange city. Fortunately, their connection with the army, and the fact that they had rendered Belgium some service, made it possible for them to get food and lodging.

"We have forgotten one thing," said Ralph.

"What is that?" inquired Alfred.

"Why, we never went to the Post Office," replied Ralph.

At the General Post Office they received a letter from Alfred's father, only to learn that he had been detained, as was the case with thousands of Americans, and that it would be impossible for him to reach Antwerp. Instead, he would be permitted to go through Switzerland, and from that country reach Paris where he hoped to meet them.

"But we have no money now, what shall we do?" asked Alfred.

"That's what worries me," answered Ralph. "Father supposes that Pierre is still with us, and that we are supplied with money."

Three days after receiving the letter the boys heard the first definite news of the great movement of German troops designed to attack the forts. If they surrounded the city, and besieged it, the chances of reaching Paris would be small, indeed.

"Something must be done, and that today," said Ralph. "I am going to leave if I have to walk."

"Where to?" asked Alfred.

Ralph smiled, as he said: "We might walk to Holland."

Alfred almost shouted for joy, as he exclaimed: "That's a good idea. We have about ten francs left; that ought to take us through."

A map was consulted. "Why, yes," said Alfred, "we can go north to Eeckeren, and from that place to Capellen, close to the frontier. It's only twelve miles."

After this decision they again visited the Post Office, and immediately crossed through the city with a view of striking the main highway leading to Holland. Reaching the outskirts of the city, they were surprised to see great masses of Belgian troops encamped close to the forts, which guarded the highway. They soon learned that a strong German column had reached Brasscheat, three miles from Eeckeren.

They looked at each other in amazement. "Well, this beats everything," said Alfred, with a shade of bitterness. "The Germans seem to be in our way whichever direction we turn. We'll have to take another route."

"Another route?" blurted out Ralph. "There isn't another way to go on this side of the river. It would be a long tramp to cross the river."

They were now in a serious dilemma, and stood there undecided as to the best course to follow, when they were startled by a voice: "Hello, boys!"

"It's Pierre!" shouted Alfred, who was the first to spy their friend.

"And how did you get here?" asked Alfred. "We thought they had captured you at Rouen."

"So they did, but we got away the same night. But where are you going?" returned Pierre.

"Trying to get to Holland," he was informed.

"I am afraid you will have to go south of the Scheldt to get there," Pierre then informed them.

"But I received a letter from father, and he wants us to meet him in Paris," said Alfred. "You know we don't want to be shut up in the city, if the Germans are going to surround it."

"Of course not," answered Pierre. "But in the meantime we must find some other way out. You know you are still in the army, in the messenger service, and come to think of it, you haven't received any pay so far, have you?"

The boys laughed, for that part of it had been entirely forgotten.

"Why, yes; the Germans paid us for work at the hospital," said Ralph.

"And you repaid them by skipping out the next day," said Pierre with a smile.

"How much do you think there is due us now?" asked Alfred.

"I don't know what you are on the rolls for, but there must be a full month's pay due, and that would be about thirty-five francs apiece," said Pierre.

"Thirty-five francs!" mused Ralph. "Twice thirty-five is seventy,—about fourteen dollars. Good, that will take us through."

"I suggest that you come to headquarters and join us. We intend to cross the river. It will be the safest place for you," said Pierre.

"That will suit me," said Ralph.

Together they marched to headquarters where they were again installed and placed on the rolls. Late that night the regiment began its march, reaching the dock below Antwerp at ten o'clock, where they had a long wait before the crowded boats left the pier. On landing, the march was resumed, and did not halt for two hours, so it was nearly three in the morning before they were able to lie down for the much needed sleep.

It did not seem that they had slept a half hour when they were awakened by the heavy booming notes of cannon, and the occasional rattle and crash of small guns. The boys now knew the kind of music which the different weapons ground out.

"That's a machine gun, see how regularly the shots come," said Alfred.

"Yes; and that's a salvo from infantry," replied Ralph. "The Mannlicher guns have an awfully snappy way of talking. Do you hear it? There it is again. They must be rushing some of the outer works."

The real fight, however, was between the forts and the heavy German guns, which continued during the entire day, principally on the southern and eastern sides of the city. The struggle was continuous for four days. Suddenly Pierre burst in with the startling information:

"The Germans have silenced two of the forts, and Antwerp is doomed."

No time was lost by the defending troops, and before noon the camp was dismantled, and the march begun.

"Do you know where we are going!" asked Alfred.

"Nothing more than that we are going to leave Antwerp, and try to reach the sea," replied Pierre.

The Belgian army had begun its famous march across the northern end of Belgium in order to reach the sea, and secure the protection of the English fleet in the Channel.

"I heard some one say that we intended going through Bruges," said Ralph.

"Yes; and from there the army may be able to reach France, after passing through Ostend," said Pierre.

In an air line Bruges is fifty miles from Antwerp, and from Bruges to the French frontier it is fully forty miles more. How the brave little army finally reached its destination, avoiding the large German forces sent out to intercept them, remains one of the most glorious exploits in the history of the Belgian army.

"Next to Belgium I am glad to be in France," said Pierre. "Now you can get to Paris without difficulty," he added.

It thus happened that six weeks after the boys entered Belgium southwest of Liege, they reached Dunkirk on the French coast, and saw the immense fleet of warships and transports, which the British had in the harbor. It seemed that every spot around the city was taken up by tents, wagons, mules, horses, and heavy guns, to say nothing of the soldiers on every hand.

One regiment after the other entrained in cars, and were whirled to the south. Box cars, flat cars, some new, others dilapidated, were in service. It seemed that there were thousands of automobiles in line, and every one was anxious to get away. They even saw thousands of men, with full kits on their backs, march out to the east, as though they scorned to wait for railway or auto accommodations.

Pierre was at the door of the boys' tent early in the morning of the second day. "I am glad to tell you that the roll has been signed, and you can get your pay," he said. "But I am awfully sorry to have you go."

"Of course, we've had some pretty hard times," said Ralph, "but it was a great experience. Maybe we'll come back again."

"We're going to try to join the flying machines," said Alfred.

Pierre laughed, and Ralph smiled, for, while that idea was uppermost in his mind, he had never discussed the subject with Alfred sufficiently to enable them to call it a plan that they really intended to follow out. It was more an enthusiastic feeling of something that they would like to do, without knowing just how they would go about it.

"So you are really going to start for Paris this afternoon?" said Pierre.

"Yes; we ought to be there now, for father will wonder what is the matter with us. You see he hasn't heard from us for six weeks, and it has been two weeks since we received his letter," said Ralph.

"Then why don't you wire the Continental Hotel, Paris, and tell him you are on the way? It will relieve his anxiety. Tell him to answer you at once, for it may take you several days to reach Paris," said Pierre.

"Several days?" queried Alfred.

"Yes, indeed. Troops occupy all the cars now," replied Pierre.

So the telegram was sent, and it was decided to remain where they were until morning so as to receive the reply before starting. But no answer came that night or the next day. In the meantime, the boys wandered from place to place, for, as they still wore the trim Belgian suits, they were privileged to visit many places barred from civilians.

In the afternoon they found themselves far down the road leading to Ypres, when they were startled at the sound of an unusual buzzing, and soon divined the cause as they saw a dozen or more airplanes flying around over the broad fields to the east. Nothing more was needed to give the boys an inspiration. They moved toward the great field, as though a giant magnet pulled them. Long

before they were near the hangars they could see the flyers far above them, circling about. The scene fascinated them.

Then something like a dull explosion startled them, and they looked at each other and then glanced about.

"There it is; look at it; directly above us," shouted Alfred, in great excitement.

"Something has happened; it's on fire," said Ralph.

In an incredibly short space of time, something struck and rattled along the ground not far from them, but the machine, although falling, was still some hundreds of feet from the earth. One of the operators could be seen frantically drawing back the levers, and trying to hold the badly damaged ship from overturning, but his efforts were unavailing.

The boys closed their eyes as the swiftly moving machine now actually rolled down through space, tumbling over and over, until it finally struck the ground with a crashing noise, not a hundred feet from where they stood. Terrorized at the sight, they stood still for a few moments, but this was no worse than the scenes they had witnessed in battle, so, without a word, they made a rush for the mound of debris.

"They are both under the machine," said Alfred.

"Look at the smoke; it's afire," shouted Ralph.

"Use sand! use sand!" almost shrieked Alfred.

They had early learned that sand is more effectual as a fire extinguisher of burning oil than water, if properly applied. Handfuls of sand were scooped up and applied. A groan from one of the men arrested their movements.

Alfred jumped on the broken mass, and peered down. "There he is!" he shouted. Ralph crawled over the broken body of the airplane, and reached down.

"No; this man is lying still," he said. "Here he is; come on this side; he is under the framework."

The scene was one which well might inspire heroic work.

The imprisoned man was quite young, with handsome features, and it seemed cruel that such a fate should overtake him. The boys strained at the wreck until it moved.

"Brace it up on that side," said Ralph.

The truss from the fuselage was removed from the aviator, the man quickly drawn out from his perilous position, and carried clear of the wreck.

"Now for the other one," said Alfred.

Blood was still flowing across the face of the other flyer, as they crawled over the wreck to draw him out.

"This one is alive, I am sure," said Ralph.

"Why, yes; his heart is beating," replied Alfred, as the injured men were laid side by side.

"I have heard that they have first aid packages in machines of this kind," said Ralph, as he sprang toward the remains of the machine. "I have it," he cried, as he leaped over the wrecked pieces. "Here is—a—*Restorative*, whatever that is,—half a wineglass at a time,—where's the wineglass?"

"Give each a good swallow of it," said Alfred, as he raised up the head of the one first rescued.

The other man opened his eyes. "Lieutenant!" he said. Then, as he gazed at the boys, he seemed to smile, and as Alfred held up the bottle he feebly nodded.

It seemed to revive him in a few moments, and he struggled to raise himself. "I feel better now, but something hurts my legs," he said.

The lieutenant opened his eyes, and quietly looked at the boys without speaking.

"Can I do anything for you?" said Alfred.

"Is Jack hurt?" he asked.

"Yes; but he is all right," said Ralph.

"Here I am; still on top," said Jack, as he slightly turned, and moved his hand toward the lieutenant.

"And what are you boys doing here?" asked the lieutenant.

"On our way to Paris," said Alfred.

"But where did you get the uniforms?" asked the officer.

"Why, we've been in the Belgian army, and were in several fights," said Ralph proudly.

The lieutenant's face brightened into a smile, which quickly changed to one of pain. An ambulance stopped alongside with startling suddenness, for the boys had been too busy to notice that the watchers at the hangars had signaled for assistance. The men were carefully carried to the van, and as they were about to start the lieutenant motioned to the doctor in charge, and said:

"I want the boys to come along with us."

CHAPTER II

IN THE AVIATION CAMP

Once inside the ambulance the boys had an opportunity to watch the doctors, as they removed the clothing from the men, and began a search for the location and nature of the injuries. It was a gratification to be able to assist in this work. Jack's legs were both broken, and the lieutenant's chest, back and right arm were bruised and clotted with blood.

"I think they are all right," said the doctor in charge.

"But it's awfully hard breathing," said the lieutenant.

"You must have had a pretty good weight on top of you," remarked the doctor.

"I should think so," said Ralph. "It was all we could do to lift up the cross piece of the frame from him."

"We'll straighten you out in a few days," answered the doctor, "but your companion didn't fare as well. Compound fracture of one leg; but he has a good constitution; he's good for several trips yet."

The gratitude of the lieutenant was plainly observable, and the doctor was quick to notice it. "If these young men hadn't taken you out when they did it would have been all over with you, because the weight prevented you from breathing."

The lieutenant tried to smile, as he gazed at the boys, and they understood.

When the ambulance reached the hospital there were fifty or more aviators from the station, awaiting the news. The boys leaped out, the attendants were on hand with the stretchers, while the excited men crowded around the boys to learn the details. It was not long before the story of the rescue was known. The chief of the flying squadron came out of the hospital, and approached the boys. The latter straightened up and saluted.

"You should be commended for the prompt work you performed in rescuing the lieutenant and his pilot. I understand you belong to the Belgian army; but you are not Belgians, are you?" he asked.

"No, we are not," said Alfred, slightly embarrassed at the question.

The Commandant smiled as he continued: "I take it that you are Americans?"

"Yes, Captain; you are right," replied Ralph. "We joined the Belgian army at Liege, and fought the enemy all the way to Antwerp, and we had some pretty hot times, too."

This speech was applauded heartily, while a young man sprang forward, held out his hand and said: "And here's United States, too."

"We are not with the army now," said Alfred, recovering; "we hope to go to Paris, if it is possible to get there."

"The chances for that are not very good at present," observed the Commandant, "but in the meantime, if you are not attached, you must put up with us."

"Thank you for the offer," said Ralph eagerly. "We want to get into the flying service; that will just suit us."

"I am afraid that the army provisions would not permit you to join," said the officer, and all noted the expressions of disappointment that indicated the boys' feelings at this announcement.

"Then I suppose we'll have to force our way in, just as we did in Belgium," said Alfred.

This was greeted with a sally of laughter. The boys had made a hit with the corps, and they accepted the offer of quarters for their accommodation in the firm belief that something would turn up to assist them in their desires.

Boys are really at a disadvantage sometimes. This story, as well as many others, shows that they are capable of doing things as well as men, and that they can do some things better than most men; but in military matters the service seems to have been made for grown-up people on the principle that war is too barbarous a thing for young men until they are twenty years of age.

The boys, who were now in their glory, had a portion of a small room in a wooden building assigned to them. At this time there were fifty machines of various types on the ground, the particular makes being the Bristol, the B. E., several Farman machines, and a half dozen Sopworth tractors.

Tom Walton, the young American who greeted them at the hospital, was accorded the privilege of escorting the boys and introducing them. That they had been in the first battles of the war was sufficient to give them a coveted place in that company of enthusiastic men, for there was some glory in having been on a battlefield,—a thing which could have been said of only a few of those who entertained them that day.

"I suppose you want to see the machines," said Tom.

"Indeed, we do," said Alfred. "What is that big machine over there?"

"That is a Bristol," answered Tom.

"And there is another one," remarked Ralph, pointing to a machine, which was being drawn out of the hangar.

"No, that's a B. E. biplane," answered Tom. "You will see the difference by observing the shape of the planes. The Bristol has the ends of the wings rounded so that the forward corners are cut away to a greater extent than the rear corners. In the B. E. the wings are cut to conform with the well-known Wright type."

"That's a Farman machine, I know," said Ralph, pointing to an aeroplane which had a huge revolving type of motor forward of the main planes.

"Yes; but when that machine is high in the air it would be difficult to recognize it from that description," said Tom. "You will notice that the lower plane is much shorter than the upper plane, and that it has a great spreading tail,—larger than any other machine now made."

"Here is another kind, a little fellow. That certainly looks different from all the others," said Alfred, as they stopped in front of a hangar.

"That's the Sopworth tractor, a fine, speedy machine, with square ends to the planes, and a heart-shaped tail. It can be distinguished at any altitude," answered Tom.

"I notice that that has different tails," said Ralph. "Does that make any difference in the flying?"

"Not in the least. Shape has nothing to do with it. Surface is all that counts. They are made with distinctive forms so that they may be easily distinguished, one from the other."

"We saw some German airplanes, several dozens of them, in Belgium, and the only one I could recognize was the Taube, as they called it. They have fan-shaped tails," said Alfred.

"But here is the machine for business," said Tom, as they halted in front of a gaily decorated hangar, and pointed to a trim little machine, which was being overhauled.

"I see you have the Stars and Stripes above the door," said Ralph.

"Yes; and this is my machine; isn't it a beauty?" said Tom with a considerable show of pride.

"What is it? I mean what make?" asked Alfred.

"It is a French Morane; I have made many trips in it," said Tom, "and now I am going to use it against the Dutchies."

Thus they were conducted from place to place, visited the machine shop, which had been set up for repairs, and then inspected the landing field, which was designed to be illuminated for night work.

"Do you mean to say that you use the flying machines at night?" asked Ralph.

"Why, certainly; that is going to be a great stunt," said Tom. "The only trouble is that where there are many lights about it is pretty hard for a pilot to hunt out the landing place, so the authorities have made special provision for returning aviators to enable them to land with as much safety as in the daytime."

"How is it arranged so they can land without a mistake?" asked Alfred.

"Do you see that tall pylon, over there?" replied Tom. "That has on it the pilot light, much more brilliant than anything in sight. Now, look over to the left, nearly a quarter of a mile away; that pylon carries a brilliant red light. The other two pylons to the north and to the south have blue lights. The

aviator knows that the bright light is to the east of the red light, and that he must make a landing somewhere between the brilliant light and the red light, between the limits marked by the blue lights."

"I should think that would be easy," said Ralph.

"It is when the night is clear; but the trouble is that the fog from the channel gives us considerable trouble, and then we have to glide back and forth very low to get our bearings, and that is dangerous business in the night."

The inspection raised the enthusiasm of the boys to the highest pitch. For them there was now no other life than flying, and, indeed, things seemed to be coming their way. They had learned more about machines during the two hours thus spent than they had acquired in all their lives previous to that time.

"I want to ask a favor of you," said Alfred, as they were returning to their quarters.

"Go ahead," said Tom.

"I would like to go up in a machine with you," was the reply.

Tom stopped, and looked at Alfred. "Do you really mean it?" he asked.

"Of course I do," replied Alfred.

"That's what I want to do, too," chimed in Ralph.

"It's against the rules to take up any one but the observers during practice hours; but let me see, —we may be able to fix it up some other time," said Tom.

"Do you have to do much practicing?" asked Alfred.

"Only from six to eight hours a day," answered Tom.

"What! do you mean practice flying when you are not scouting?" asked Ralph.

"Well, I should say so," was the answer.

"How long have you been flying?" asked Ralph.

"About two years," said Tom.

"And still they make you fly every day, for practice?" asked Alfred.

"Of course," said Tom.

"And what is that for?" asked Alfred.

"Flying airplanes for war purposes is something different to ordinary flying. The principal practice is to learn the methods of attack and defense. But that is not all. The airplane is the eye of the army; the observer must know how to observe. He must be able not only to see, but to put his knowledge into such form that it can be handed in in the form of a report. While he may get the information he must learn that the information is not for his own gratification, but for the use of the men in the field," said Tom.

"Do all the machines carry a pilot and an observer?" asked Ralph.

"Not by any means," answered Tom. "The first duty of a pilot is to learn how to control his machine when approaching an enemy, and how to attack or to avoid him. For that purpose he has a machine gun which he uses in flying."

"I had no idea that there was so much to do in the business," said Alfred.

"That is only part of the practice," continued Tom. "The most interesting part of the work is to practice flying in squadron formation, to observe the signals of the commanding officer and to execute movements. For this purpose two squadrons oppose each other, and sally forth, the object being to judge the objects of an attacking force and to devise means to repel the enemy."

The boys sat on their improvised bunks until a late hour that night. They discussed the airplanes; the men they had met; their work in rescuing the fallen aviators, and the things they had learned in this, to them, the most eventful day.

"I wonder what father would say if he knew we were going to join the aviation corps?" said Alfred.

"Well, I wonder what he will say when he hears what we were doing in Belgium," replied Alfred.

"He must have gotten our letters by this time," said Ralph.

"Then why doesn't he answer our telegram?" asked Alfred.

"Why, we forgot to go back to the city and inquire for it," said Ralph.

"That's so; but we've been too busy for that; we must do that the first thing in the morning," said Alfred.

CHAPTER III

THE WOUNDED AVIATORS

They were out early the next morning, and started for the tramway a mile distant. They passed Tom's hangar, and stopped for a moment to take a look at his machine. As they were leaving they heard his voice:

"Going to leave us?" he inquired.

"No; but we must go to the city to get our mail, and we are expecting a telegram," shouted Ralph.

"Get back by eleven o'clock if you can," was the answer.

"We'll be here, sure," said Alfred.

"He must mean that we can have a try in the machine at that time, I suppose," remarked Ralph.

"I imagine that's why he wants us back then," answered Alfred.

They covered the mile in record time. The idea of going up in a machine was a stimulus, and they talked about it all the way, and wondered what it would feel like to sail above the earth in a war-machine.

At the post office they had their first disappointment, and there was nothing at the telegraph office. They were perplexed at the absence of news, but consoled themselves with the thought that transportation from the Swiss frontier might be in the same condition as at the Western front, so they decided they would not remain long in the city.

The city, containing a population of about 40,000, is located on the sand dunes. It takes its name from the old church of St. Eloi, and means *church on the dunes*. It has been in existence for over a thousand years, and was owned by the Dutch, the Spaniards, and the English, before it became permanent French territory.

Passing through the principal square, on their way to the terminus of the tram cars, they saw crowds of people moving toward the main landing place of vessels. They followed, and witnessed the debarkation of the first vessel load of Red Cross supplies, accompanied by a large corps of physicians and Red Cross nurses.

Fully fifty vans were taken from the ship and lined up, with their equipments, ready for a prompt start. A number of lorries (large motor trucks), carrying beds, bedding and like material, followed, and were placed behind the vans.

"Do you know where they are going?" asked Ralph, addressing a young man in uniform.

"To the general hospital, where they will be assigned to stations near the front," he replied.

"Do you mean the general hospital near the aviation ground?" inquired Alfred.

"Yes," was the answer.

"Probably we can get a chance to ride there," said Ralph, addressing Alfred.

The man overheard the remark, and quickly turned to the boys.

"Are you attached to the flying squadron?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Alfred.

"Then they wouldn't object, I am sure," answered the officer, and he strode forward. After speaking a few words to one who seemed to be in charge, he motioned to them.

"Get in, boys," he said.

They were quick to respond, and, after thanking the officer, mounted one of the vans. Inside were three nurses and two physicians, who smiled at the boys.

"So you are going to war, too?" said one of the nurses, as she made room for them.

"Yes," said Alfred, rather shyly; "we are going back."

"Going back?" remarked one of the doctors. "Did you say 'going back?'" he inquired.

"Well, we were with the Belgian army from Liege to Antwerp, and came across the northern part of Belgium with them," said Alfred.

"Then you must have seen some fighting?" asked one of the others, much interested.

"Yes, indeed; we were in the first battles of the war," said Ralph.

The information was certainly an interesting bit of news. From that time on the boys were the center of interest, and many questions were plied and answered.

"But where are you bound now?" asked one of the doctors. "If I understand correctly, you are attached to the aviation corps, is that so?"

"Yes, we are being put up by them, and we may do some flying in a few days," said Alfred.

"We do hope you will be successful," said one of the nurses. "Won't you tell us where you are from?"

"We are from New York," said Alfred.

"Then you are not English?" she asked.

"Oh, no," replied Alfred. "But that doesn't make any difference. It's just the same as though we were English. We want to help out."

There was a merry roar of laughter at this, and Ralph immediately chimed in with a sort of explanation: "The Germans didn't treat us right, when they captured us, and, anyhow, they had no business to attack Belgium."

"Good for you," said a sweet little miss. "We like Americans, and especially those like you who have that spirit."

The vans covered the ground to the general hospital in quick time, and the boys were really sorry when the van drew up before the building, but they quickly recognized the place where they had accompanied the injured aviators the previous day.

"Ralph, we ought to go in and see the lieutenant and Jack," said Alfred.

"Who are they?" interposed the doctor.

"Why, they fell with their machine yesterday, and we helped them out," said Alfred.

"What was the lieutenant's name?" asked the doctor.

"Why, we don't know; we forgot to ask for it; but maybe they will let us in," said Ralph.

"Come along," said the doctor. "We'll find a way to get in."

They followed him up the steps, and marched to the office, where the doctor was greeted by many of those present.

"Who was it that met with an accident yesterday?" he asked.

"Lieutenant Winston," was the reply.

"And was he badly hurt?" almost shrieked the sweet little nurse who had accompanied the party in the van.

"No; he is getting along well," said the attending physician. "He owes his life to a couple of brave lads, who happened to be near. He has been anxious to see the boys, and has asked where they were."

"We are the ones who helped him," said Ralph. "We want to see him; may we?"

"Oh, thank you, thank you so much," said the nurse.

"Do you know him?" inquired Alfred.

"He is my brother; may we go to him at once?" she asked.

"I will take you to him," said the physician.

"So you are Miss Winston?" said Alfred. "Isn't it funny how we happened to meet you?"

She almost hugged the boys in her joy at the news, and at her good fortune in thus meeting the boys who were instrumental in saving her brother.

The lieutenant saw his sister approaching arm in arm with the two boys. The greeting was a most affectionate one.

"I met the two boys in Dunkirk; they just happened to get into our van. We learned after we got here what they had done. Isn't it noble of them?" she said.

"I have tried to find them all day," said the lieutenant, and he pressed the hands of the boys. "Yes, I was in an awfully tight place when the boys found me; but I am all right now."

They remained with the lieutenant and his sister for more than an hour. They had entirely forgotten their appointment with Tom. It was nearly twelve o'clock.

"I am afraid we shall have to leave you," said Ralph. "We promised Tom to be over at the hangar at eleven."

"Tom Brandon; the American dare-devil?" said the lieutenant, smiling.

"Why, yes," replied Alfred, somewhat hesitatingly. "Is he a dare-devil?" he continued, with wide-open eyes.

"Well, he doesn't seem to be afraid of anything; I suppose he would go anywhere, if he was ordered to make the trip. Is your engagement an important one?" asked the lieutenant, with a curious light in his eye.

"Why,—yes,—we—we wanted to take a flight this afternoon," said Ralph.

"Do you think they would let us?" asked Alfred quickly.

"Rather against the rules and somewhat risky," said the lieutenant, slowly shaking his head, but his face relaxed, as he saw the crestfallen appearance of the boys. "We can get around the rules sometimes," he added.

"Tom said he would try to fix it for us," said Ralph.

"Then go at once, and tell him that Winston gave him permission," said the lieutenant. "Do you think it is safe, Addie?" he asked, turning to his sister.

"It seems to me it is safe to trust boys who have been in battles as they have, don't you?" she replied sweetly, as she arose and grasped the boys' hands. "Now, don't forget us, will you?"

"No, indeed; we intend to come over to see you in the morning," said Ralph.

The boys fairly flew across the broad grounds in order to reach the hangar. Their chagrin was great as they peered in to find that Tom and his machine were absent.

"Looking for Tom?" asked one of the men.

"Yes; do you know where he is?" asked Alfred.

"He's coming now, I think," was the reply, as the man approached the door and glanced upward. "Yes; there he is, winging it in."

Within two minutes the Morane gave a quick dive, then flattened out and skimmed the ground, and just before alighting the nose of the machine gave a short, quick, upward dart.

"He does that the slickest of the whole lot. That was a quick stop, sure enough," remarked an attendant.

The machine had landed not two hundred feet from the hangar. The boys were over without delay, and accosted Tom, as he reached the ground.

"We are sorry that we couldn't get here in time, but we met Lieutenant Winston's sister coming over, and we were detained at the hospital," said Ralph.

"It's just as well, as I couldn't make it. The commandant wouldn't give me the time to take you out," said Tom.

"But the lieutenant told us to tell you that he gave you permission to take us," said Alfred.

"Did he say that? Well, that's another thing. I'll tell the commandant," and, without another word, he crossed the field, and disappeared. He was back in five minutes, and waved his hat as he appeared.

"All right, boys; we'll have an hour's flight; how will that suit you?" he said.

The boys were too much excited to know what to say in reply. Tom walked around the machine, observing every part of the control plane and the wires, then mounted the chassis, and with a wrench unscrewed the base of the machine gun.

"Here, boys; we'll take this off for the afternoon; it'll give you more room. There, take hold of it at both ends, and carry it into the hangar," he said, as he handed down the weapon.

"Gee! but that weighs something!" said Ralph.

"Close to eighty pounds, I should say," observed Tom.

"Where shall we sit?" asked Alfred.

"You can easily crowd into the hole in front," said Tom. "Now don't get frightened and jump out; I can bring you down easier than that. If it seems to turn over, don't mind. That's part of the game."

The Morane was equipped with a self-starter, but three attendants were on hand to hold the machine. They took their places and Tom turned on the switch. Whir-r-r-r-r,—they felt the tremor of the machine. Soon Tom's hand was raised and came down with a swift motion. They felt the machine slowly gain headway, and then it seemed to spring forward with huge leaps. At first they could feel the oscillating motion of the wheels, and as the speed increased there was less jar until finally there was no further vertical movement, and they no longer felt the wheels traveling over the ground.

"We're up!" shouted Ralph in excitement, as he turned to Tom. The latter evidently knew what Ralph meant, even though the noise of the motor prevented him from hearing, for he merely smiled, and shook his head.

Alfred leaned over the side of the body, and gazed at the wheels, and as he did so something seemed to push the seat of the aeroplane upwardly. He quickly turned toward Tom and smiled. They were in the air. How glorious it seemed to Ralph and Alfred at that moment. The feeling was an indescribable one; they were now going up rapidly; ahead was a tall pylon, which seemed to be directly in their way.

Ralph seized Alfred's arm, and pointed toward it, their eyes being intently fixed on the square flag which flew above the mast, but the machine seemed to whiz by it like a streak. After passing it the machine seemed to slow down. They were not aware that the closer you are to an object the faster seems to be the motion. Looking down at the earth they could note an object for some time, and as they went further up and up, things on the earth seemed to pass by with less and less speed.

The most confusing thing to them was the constant change of position. Instead of making a straight-away flight Tom circled around the aviation field twice, going higher on each turn. The great hangar was plainly visible each time they came around, but it grew smaller and smaller.

The boys leaned over the body of the machine, and scanned the earth below. It was too grand and inspiring for words. It was some time before they began to realize that the hangars were disappearing, and that the machine was now going forward in one direction. The country below was a confused maze of narrow yellow streaks, bordered by green and yellow spots, with innumerable rows of dark green and brown bands and patches, which they soon recognized as trees, while cottages and larger buildings dotted the whole landscape as far as the eye could reach.

Alfred was the first to cast his eyes to the north. What he saw almost startled him. A dark vivid green spread to the horizon, blending with a pale mist, far, far away.

"Look! look!" he cried.

"That's the sea!" shouted Ralph.

Tom smiled as he reveled in their joy. He pointed ahead, and the boys quickly turned. Far off, in the distance, they saw what seemed to be immense fields of snow.

"What can that be?" asked Ralph.

Alfred shook his head, and gazed silently, then turned toward Tom. "Can you make it out?" he asked Ralph. The latter shook his head.

The machine went on for ten minutes more. Beyond the white fields something else arrested their attention; great clouds of smoke were observed. They were not clouds, and there was no fire visible on the earth. That was the second mystery.

"I know what that is now," said Ralph.

"What is it?" asked Alfred.

"Tents, tents," said Ralph.

"Yes, and that smoke must come from the big guns," said Alfred.

Ralph turned his head toward Tom, and raised his cap. The latter knew that the boys recognized the nature of the scene before them.

"That must be a battle," said Alfred, as he pointed to the great clouds of smoke.

"Look way over to the left," shouted Ralph. "See that long, narrow road? There is something moving there."

"Why, that is cavalry; sure enough. See, they are turning a corner in the road. That's plain enough," said Alfred.

"I wonder if he is going to take us over the German lines?" queried Ralph.

"And suppose something happens, and we are compelled to go down; we'll be in a nice fix," remarked Alfred.

Ralph shook his head, and glanced back toward Tom. The latter, however, soon turned the machine. As he did so a dozen or more aeroplanes came into view. They noticed that the machine was going toward a field where a huge gas bag was moored near the ground. It was an observation balloon. Beyond were several dozens of flying machines drawn up in front of the hangars. Tom circled the machine around several times; the earth came nearer, and soon they observed a long stretch of green that seemed to invite them. In another minute they were several hundred feet from the earth, and they seemed to go faster and faster.

"Whew! but doesn't it scoot now," said Alfred.

They grasped the body of the car, while it seemed to fairly sizzle through the air. Closer and closer the earth crept up toward them. They felt that it would be necessary to hold fast when the shock came. The next sensation was most peculiar; the body of the car began to rock up and down; the din of the motor had ceased, and they were riding on the earth.

CHAPTER IV

TRENCH WORK WITH THE BRITISH FORCES

Everyone seemed to know Tom, as he was heartily greeted on all sides. The appearance of the boys, however, was a puzzle to the group of aviators.

"Let me introduce my friends, Ralph and Alfred, genuine American boys, who were with the Belgians in their great fight from Liege to Antwerp," said Tom.

"How did that happen?" asked one of the men, as he grasped their hands.

"We were on the spot when war was declared, and we just pitched in and helped them out," replied Ralph.

"Were you in any battles?" asked another.

"Oh, in a dozen, or so," answered Alfred.

"Good boys!" shouted several.

"How did you happen to get here?" asked the first interrogator.

"We came over with the Belgians, from Antwerp," said Ralph.

The foregoing information was enough to introduce the boys, and they were gratified to find several other Americans in the party.

The reception was cut short by the peculiar antics of a huge Farman machine, which was approaching in an erratic manner. It seemed to dart back and forth, and swing around in short circles, as though wounded.

"Something is the matter with Le Clere," shouted Tom.

At that moment the machine darted toward the earth, and the boys held their breaths at the anticipated calamity. Fifty feet from the earth the machine righted itself, and swooped upward, then, with a vicious plunge, it went down and struck the earth, the crash being plainly heard, although it landed more than five hundred feet from where they stood.

Every one on the ground rushed toward the fallen aviator. Before they reached the scene, two men extricated themselves, and stood on the debris.

"What was the matter?" asked Ralph.

"Look at the holes in the wings," said Tom. "That tells the story; pretty well riddled."

"Are you all right?" shouted one of the men.

"Yes, but that was a dandy fight, and we brought him down," replied Le Clere, a daring Frenchman, who handled the machine gun.

The Gnome motor was lying on the ground twenty feet from the wreckage. One of the planes was tilted up at an angle, and was uninjured, but it carried the marks of twenty holes, through which the sunlight streamed.

"That will give you an idea of the fascinating work we are engaged in," said Tom, pointing to the bullet marks. The body of the machine was wrecked, and the fuselage a mass of splinters. It was, indeed, a mystery how the two flyers escaped without injury.

"What will they do with the machine?" asked Alfred.

"They'll build up another out of it in two days," said Tom.

"The Germans are marching west and south of Roubaix," said Le Clere. "They have already reached Mons, and are going straight toward Paris."

The boys looked at each other in amazement. It seemed as though their trip to Paris would be interrupted, after all. Tom seemed to read their thoughts.

"How far is it to Mons?" asked Alfred.

"About fifty miles south," said Tom.

"And what is the name of the town which we saw before we came down?" asked Ralph.

"Lille," was the response. "But we must be going back," continued Tom. "We are going to move south in the morning, and I have a few things to pack up."

After bidding good-bye to every one, they climbed into the airplane, and those present gave the boys a cheer, as the machine glided forward. Tom had promised to give them an hour's flight, and it was now four o'clock. They had heard about taking observations, while on the grounds at Lille, and they busied themselves in trying to do work of that character. How small the houses were! They could see little creeping things, that soon evolved themselves into horses and wagons, but they seemed unreal.

The flight to Lille covered a distance of forty-five miles, and it took them an hour. It didn't seem that they could have been aloft half of that time. Now, on returning, the novelty had worn off, and they were so much interested that they forgot to look at their watches until the deep blue haze, which betokened the approach to the sea, aroused them.

"Why, it's past five o'clock," said Ralph. "Tom was going for an hour's flight only," said Alfred.

"He just said that in fun, I suppose," replied Ralph.

After alighting the boys did not know how to fully express their appreciation of Tom's kindness for the great treat, and they inquired whether they could not be of some service to him, as they were only too anxious to help him out in any way that would be useful.

"Why, no; I don't know what I can put you at," replied Tom. "Of course, there's always lots to do about the hangar, and the first thing to learn is how the machines are built, and how to handle them; and then, an important thing is to learn all the tricks in a gasoline engine."

"That's just what we want to learn," said Alfred, enthusiastically.

"But I thought you had to go to Paris to meet your father?" said Tom.

"Yes," replied Alfred ruefully; "but we can come back. I'm sure there will be no objections."

"Of course, it's your first duty to go to Paris—that is, if you can get there," said Tom, rather slyly.

There was now nothing for them to do but to make an effort to reach Paris. Immediately after landing, they started for the tram way, and reached Dunkirk after six in the evening.

"I never was as hungry in my life," said Ralph.

"Do you know why?" answered Alfred.

"Come to think of it, we didn't get anything to eat at noon," was Ralph's answer.

After alighting from the cars, their first mission was to seek a restaurant, and from that point they soon reached the post office, only to be again disappointed. At the telegraph office they had the same bad luck.

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