



SEND HIM UP WITH SANDERS

by WALLACE R. BAMBER

When a new pilot came up to the Squadron the C.O. said "Send him up with Sanders"—and Sanders never failed to know at once a good pilot from a bad one. And no one knew his method!

CAPTAIN EUGENE SANDERS was a half wing. He wasn't a pilot, he was an observer. As observers rated, he wasn't an exceptional one. His code work was very poor and he had a slight physical imparity in his eyesight that handicapped him somewhat.

But he had one exceptional quality that all the

others observers lacked. That one quality made him extremely valuable to Major Raymond, C.O. of the 91st. Observation Squadron, to which he was attached. He could tell a good pilot from a poor one far sooner than the commanding officer, himself, could. When a new pilot came up to the squadron, the first thing the C.O. would say to the operations officer, was:

“Send him up with Sanders.”

Unlike the other observers in the squadron, Sanders had no particular pilot with whom he teamed up, although at one time or another, he had flown with all of them, including even the C.O. himself, on a few of the very infrequent trips that the commander took over the front lines.

The C.O. kept Sanders as a free lance, for more than one reason perhaps. But mainly, no doubt, because there were other observers who could do the regular air work as well or better than Sanders could, while none of them could do the special work that he did. How the C.O. found out that Sanders could do this particular duty so well is not exactly clear. That he did work into it, was by no special effort of his own, for he was a quiet type, never presuming, or trying to push himself forward.

However, “Send him up with Sanders” became more or less a byword with the squadron personnel. If a pilot or observer pulled a boner, some of his mates would yell: “Send him up with Sanders.” If a mechanic forgot himself and left a few tools in a cylinder head, with dire results to the engine involved, his brother greaseballs would shout: “Send him up with Sanders.”

Major Raymond put absolute faith in Sander’s report on the new pilots. He was usually out on the line himself awaiting Sander’s return, when he had been out on a first mission with some new pilot. If Sanders affirmed a curt, “He’ll do.” when he took his guns off and stepped down on the ground, that was enough. The C.O. wouldn’t ask him any more. The next day the new pilot would be assigned to some observer who he would team up with, permanently. He would never fly with Sanders again.

If Sanders should shake his head, negatively, the chances of that new pilot becoming a permanent member of the squadron personnel were very slim.

NO ONE knew just how Sanders formed his conclusions. No one ever asked him, for he wasn’t the type of man one would ask pertinent questions like that. He wasn’t inclined to be chummy or close, he was rather reserved and quiet, and kept aloof from the others in the squadron. Major Raymond, himself, wondered how Sanders had developed his keen acumen for determining just who would and who wouldn’t prove out as front line pilots.

Because Sanders method was most unusual, none of the pilots who had been over with him ever mentioned anything about it. Some of those whom he

said would do, never learned it. Others did, but they said nothing about it.

Those he had said wouldn’t do, knew well enough why after they had been over the front line with Sanders.

While all the squadron personnel treated him with respect, none of them ever became close with him. Other pilots and observers had their buddies and close friends, some even among the enlisted men. But Sanders didn’t.

He was different, chummy with no one, and was seldom seen even talking to anyone else. He spent most of his idle hours walking through the fields or the woods with his dog.

Major Raymond and the operations officer liked him despite his odd mannerisms, and would do anything they could for him, or extend any favors he wanted. But they never had opportunity to do so. He never wanted any. He never wanted leaves. He was never out of money. He never placed himself in a position to accept favors. He was never highly elated, nor was he ever in ill humor. He pursued the even tenor of his solitary existence strictly, and very peculiarly.

Yes, Captain Eugene Sanders was odd, but he was very valuable. The heavier the fighting and the greater the casualties, the calmer he became. Nothing ever perturbed him.

THE C.O. called him into headquarters one day.

“Captain,” he said. “I am going to recommend you for command of a squadron. I know that you can handle one, and I think you deserve it.”

“I’d rather you wouldn’t,” replied Sanders calmly, in his matter of fact way, no signs of emotion showing on his placid, but more than stern features. “I am quite satisfied with my present duty. In fact, I think it is the only one I am adapted for.”

“But you would have increased rank.”

“I don’t care for it,” replied Sanders.

“Well, as you will, Captain. But I would like to do something to show my appreciation. What can I do for you?”

“Nothing,” Sanders answered. “That’s easy,” said the C.O., “but I don’t think it’s satisfying.”

“It satisfies me,” said Sanders, never having changed the timbre of his voice from the first to the last.

And that was all there was to it. When Sanders left, the C.O. was more perplexed than ever.

During the Battle of Belleau Wood and the

days immediately following, the 91st. Observation Squadron was hard put for pilots. The Boche were knocking the 91st's Salmson planes down almost as fast as they went over. A continual stream of replacement pilots was coming up to the squadron.

Because of the nature of things, Sanders couldn't take all of them over in their first trips. There were too many coming up. So Major Raymond shared the duty with him.

Usually the two of them would go out on the same patrol. On these first trips the new pilots never had any special missions to perform, but would fly over the front lines, maybe behind them a few miles; and before they returned, drop down low and strafe the enemy trenches.

IT WAS at this time that a young officer by the name of Morris came up to the squadron. Being tall and heavy set, he gave the appearance of maturity, but he was really very young.

"Send him up with Sanders," said the C.O. to the operations officer. "I'll take Roberts."

Roberts had come up at the same time with Morris. Morris's papers showed that he was a good air pilot. He had passed through final acrobatics at Issoudon with distinction, and he had done as well in aerial gunnery at Cazeax. He had never flown on the front before.

When Morris got out on the dead line to step into the two place Salmson that had been assigned to him, he appeared slightly nervous, his face was colorless, and he smoked his cigarette with short spasmodic drags. Sanders paid no especial attention to him, any more than he had to the many other pilots he had directed over the lines for their first trip. He noticed that Morris was nervous, but so had been most of the others on their first flight.

Sanders climbed into the rear cockpit, and set his dual Lewis guns on the swinging cradle. Morris climbed in the front cockpit. He gave the word to the mechanics, and the motor started, Sanders pulled on his helmet and plugged in the intercommunicating phones. He spoke to Morris through them.

"You will follow my directions, Lieutenant. I will direct your course and your actions after we pass the front lines. All you have to do is follow orders. Do you understand me?"

When Morris answered: "Yes sir," his voice was shaky, but he waved to the mechanic to pull the chocks. Then swung out over the tarmac and took off.

The C.O. who was standing on the line beside another Salmson, in which he was going over with Roberts, watched Morris's plane as it took off and circled for altitude.

"He handles the ship well," he said to the C.O. who stood near him, then climbed into the plane at his side.

The two Salmsons flew toward the front together. When they passed over the trenches on the right bank of the Marne to the east of Chateau Thierry, Morris was flying at a ceiling of 10,000 feet. Roberts with the C.O. crossed over at 7,000.

Bezu, six miles behind Chateau Thierry was their objective. Visibility was good and they could see it clearly from where they were, for the sky was bright and clear, and comparatively cloudless. The sun shone brilliantly, and its rays reflected dazzlingly against the camouflaged wings of Morris's Salmson, as the C.O. watched it flying along above him.

Major Raymond searched the skies on all sides for glimpses of enemy planes, but he could catch sight of none. A few archies popped off at them when they crossed over the lines, but the bursts were not close, and the planes had little difficulty dodging them.

Over the Bois de Mont, Major Raymond ordered Roberts to slow down his motor and start gliding down toward Bezu. He expected Sanders to do the same with Morris in the other Salmson. But when he looked he saw that the other plane was still high above him, and circling. If anything it had more than 10,000 feet, rather than less.

The C.O. thought that was peculiar, for Sanders usually flew quite close when they were out together. He kept Roberts going down, however. At 3,000 he ordered Roberts to circle around the railhead below, just out of Bezu. The C.O. looked up again at Morris's plane. It was still circling high above. As he watched it, the nose dipped rather suddenly, the plane started to come down in a straight dive. The C.O. watched intently.

The dive straightened at what he figured was 7,000 feet. The Salmson flattened out and commenced circling again. The Archies "at Bezu opened up simultaneously, with a hail of exploding shrapnel. The sky was pock marked on all sides with black, floating mushroom bursts. Roberts at his low altitude was forced to violent maneuvering to escape them.

He circled around in that hail of fire for 20 minutes or so, then the C.O. ordered him to pull out homeward. Morris' plane was still over Bezu, circling at 7,000.

"That's funny," Major Raymond mumbled to himself. "Sanders usually gets down pretty low—lower than I do!"

As he watched the plane, he saw it turn and follow out above him.

When Roberts passed over the trenches at Vaux in his homeward trek, the C.O. directed him down, and they strafed the trenches at low altitudes. Roberts emptied his Vickers, the C.O. emptied one of his Lewis.

MORRIS and Sanders followed along above them, but still high up. Contrary to Major Raymond's expectations, Sanders didn't drop down and strafe the trenches as he had. The C.O. watched the plane closely while Roberts piloted him homeward. Over Domatin, far within his own lines, the Salmson began to fly queerly.

Major Raymond straightened in his seat, and gasped. The Salmson looked as if it was out of control. It wobbled momentarily, then went into a dive. Down, down, it went. The C.O. searched the skies above closely, intently.

From its downward hurtling path, the plane suddenly flattened out and shot upward. The maneuver was queer, crazy. Major Raymond directed Roberts to get closer. From its upward zoom, it stalled. The wings began to wobble, then the nose dipped, it started to spin, and continued to spin until it bored into woods below.

"Pick out a spot in the field beside those woods and set down!" the C.O. shouted through the phones to Roberts.

The plane had fallen in the trees. The branches had torn off the wings, but the fuselage had plunged through and come to rest on the hard earth beneath. Roberts jumped to the front cockpit and started pulling the pilot out of the tangled mass of wire and linen. The C.O. tried to get Sanders out of the rear cockpit.

Morris was done for when Roberts got him out. There was a gaping hole in the back of his head large enough to put a finger through. A burst of bullets had entered from the back and tore through to his forehead. Roberts laid him out beside the crashed plane and dashed back to help the major get Sanders out.

Sanders was still alive, for he was muttering unintelligible words. But he was pinioned down underneath the heavy gas tank. When Roberts lifted it up, the C.O. was able to drag him out. It was much like pulling out a half filled sack of wheat, Sanders' body was so limp and flexible. It seemed as though every bone was broken. Blood was streaming from a jagged wound in his temple, where the butts of the Lewis guns had jammed back against him, when the ship crashed.

"Get water!" the C.O. ordered.

WHEN he came back with it, the C.O. dashed it over Sander's head and chest. The captain came to. His eyes opened. He looked up hazily at the major. His lips began to quiver. They parted. Words came, faint but audible. The C.O. bent down closer to Sanders.

"I—I killed him," Sanders spoke weakly. "He wouldn't go down low enough when I ordered him to." Sanders gasped as he struggled for breath. "I trained my guns on him, and ordered him to go down again," he continued, struggling to frame the words on his quivering lips. "I said I would shoot if he didn't. He refused. I had to make my word good, so I pulled the triggers. I shot him. He's the first one who ever refused me when I trained the guns on them. I had to.

"But I—I went down with my ship, major—"

Sanders stiffened suddenly, made a vain gasp for breath, then fell over dead in Major Raymond's arms.

"Send him up with Sanders," was never uttered again.