

# THE YELLOW ACE

by J.D. ROGERS, JR.

*Read the thrilling adventures of the man who was branded a coward. Follow flaming tracers as they eat into his plane. Watch him zig-zag through steel-spattered skies—and see if he's yellow!*

**T**HE 23RD SQUADRON, R.F.C. stood at attention. Lined behind them their tiny pursuit planes crouched like beasts ready to spring upon some unseen prey.

Upon a small black speck in the western sky these war-hardened veterans focused their eyes and with incredible swiftness the speck approached to grow into the shimmering silhouette of a small battle plane.

Preceded by a powerful roar which it seemed to try to overtake, the all yellow plane came and like a large rocket flashed over the field. The pilot, glimpsing the slant of the wind socks upon a hangar, swung up on one wing in a steep vertical bank, crossed his controls and went into a fast side slip, then straightened his plane into the wind and glided to a swift and beautiful landing which brought a murmur of approval from the onlooking war-birds.

Two American mechanics who had preceded the aviator, ran forward and helped run the new terror of the air into a small building isolated from the other hangars. A few minutes later an American youth came forth. His white slip-over sweater and collegiate knickers were in sharp contrast with the neat R.F.C. uniforms of the C.O. and flight commanders that greeted him.

Thus was ushered into the World War the strangest character I have ever known and with him he brought the most powerful sky fighter ever flown in war. It was a masterpiece of his own ingenuity, the result of several, years' work, nights of thought and planning, days and months of labor; long, hard, cruel months, and from this soul-destroying toil emerged the all yellow plane. It was small, compact, heavy looking, yet it possessed power and speed and fighting qualities that baffled the best that approached it in battle.

In the make-up of this plane was the knowledge and experience of a young man who had played and worked in his father's aeroplane factory since age

permitted. Prompted by zealous patriotic duty he had built this super fighter for his country, a country which the warring nations had far surpassed in the art of building aircraft. Refused a fair demonstration of his plane by a very inexperienced air board, the youth, with his flame of patriotism quenched, turned from his own country to England whose air board was frantic for a plane fast enough and maneuverable enough to successfully combat the German demons who had held the air supremacy through the war.

England welcomed the American. Her air experts praised the flying qualities of his plane demonstrated in trying maneuvers, but they were skeptical of its fighting ability. It was then that the youth, reckless because of miserable failure at home and unexpected success abroad, offered to fly his plane in real combat to prove its fighting ability. The air board, convinced that the pilot knew the maneuvers of air combat, gave him a thirty day trial upon the battle front to prove his handiwork.

As a free lance flyer he came and upon his deeds were focused the eyes of the R.F.C., and though his exploits rival fiction, his planes never replaced the battle-scarred planes of the Allies, because he came too late; the dawn of a new world peace lay just ahead of the great offensive that the Allies were now preparing.

To the 23rd Squadron the young American came because it was stationed in a sector where there was plenty of activity. The squadron patrolled the British front, often assisting the American squadron twenty miles to the south. The men of the 23rd won an enviable reputation for themselves because of their bravery and daring, and their skill as pilots and fighters was recognized by both friend and foe. The squadron was composed entirely of British with my exception. I had come over with the first batch of American pilots to be distributed among the Allies.

JAMES LAWRENCE, the newcomer, returned the greetings of the C.O. and flight commanders without the courtesy and respect that the occasion seemed to demand. His indifferent attitude during the inspection tour on which he was led, caused many of the pilots to form unfair opinions of him. But how were they to know that his thoughts were far away and that past happenings still pulled upon his heartstrings?

The inspection party arrived in front of me. I looked into two grey eyes and read chagrin and sorrow in their depths. And yet, those eyes were strong and penetrating for I found my soul exposed to their sight. I guessed the cause of his scrutiny and was not surprised when he asked in a voice low and colorless: "American?"

I saluted and replied in the affirmative.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, "I have found one American who has been off the ground and knows what sky fighters need."

The inspection party moved on. That afternoon as I climbed from my bullet-riddled plane, having just finished escorting a photographer over the lines, my sergeant mechanic handed me an order to report to Wings immediately. Entering the small office, I found the C.O. and Lawrence in conversation. The latter acknowledged me with a nod and more close scrutiny. The C.O. asked for a report of my recent flight and after I had given it to him he leaned over his desk and fixed his eyes on me.

"Lieutenant," he said, "I have a nice soft mission for you, a whole month and no patrols."

Reading the expression of satisfaction on my face he smiled.

"Lawrence wants you assigned to him during his stay here. You are under his orders and will assist with any information that he desires. You will trail him on every trip he makes and will hand in to me a written report of each day's work which I, in turn, will send in to the air board. You will share his quarters which are connected to his private hangar."

A soft mission he called it, but I had long known that soft missions didn't exist in the air service.

That night I had a long chat with Lawrence. He was very reserved and gave very little information about himself. He had many questions for me to answer and from their general trend I discovered that he had a special dread of anti-aircraft guns. I told him he need have no fear of Archie, but he shook his head and a wry smile touched the edges of his mouth.

"I understand you never hear the one that gets

you?" His question was genuine but I could not help but laugh at the manner of his expression and I then explained to him how to maneuver when a black puff of smoke and a loud cough proclaimed the presence of a little shot from Archie.

I asked him about his past flying experience and he told me that he had been flying since he was seventeen and that he had received a little student training both in America and England. He also said that he had never been in a real air encounter.

After our talk, Lawrence outlined his plans and the instructions he gave me were very brief but very emphatic. I was to trail him on all his trips and was to remain a half mile behind him. Under no circumstances, regardless of his position and condition was I to enter into one of his fights.

When I went to bed I left him up studying maps of the front.

The next morning, when I got up, I found him out testing his plane. The tri-colored circular markings of the Allies had been newly painted on his wings. After watching him in flight for several minutes I was convinced that he was master of the flashing steed he rode.

After side slipping to a landing, he taxied up to the dead-line where his two mechanics awaited him. While supervising the refueling of his ship he saw me and called:

"Be ready to take off in forty-five minutes." And as an after-thought added, "Have plenty of gas."

Three quarters of an hour later we left the ground on our first flight together. For two hours I trailed him over half the battle front of France. He didn't seem to be seeking an encounter for he dodged every enemy patrol that hove into sight. At last, much to my satisfaction, he turned towards the nest of the 23rd.

He seemed to be in excellent spirits when I joined him after we had landed. He told me that he had found all the landmarks given on the map and that my trailing was satisfactory. As we parted, he said:

"Be ready to take off again at three."

That afternoon before he climbed into his plane I noticed that he gave every part of his fighter a thorough inspection. I decided that this was a business trip.

WE HEADED STRAIGHT into Hunland at the greatest altitude I could reach and then he was a thousand feet above me. A mile behind the lines he perched in the sky and waited. We must have been

too high for Archie to detect or else ammunition was scarce for no black puffs were in the sky.

Holding our altitude, we circled for several minutes. I was just beginning to decide that the sky was deserted, when suddenly I saw the yellow plane dive. Headed straight for the lines four thousand feet below, a solitary Fokker was speeding.

Lawrence came out of his dive a thousand feet above the Jerry and trailed him on his mission towards our lines. I held my altitude and trailed above them both.

When nearly over the lines, by a black puff of smoke and a loud cough, German Archie warned the lone Hun of danger. Absorbed in his mission, the Jerry was awakened to Lawrence's presence. As he wavered a split second for the proper move, the yellow plane dived.

For fifteen minutes I looked down upon one of the greatest sky duels I have ever seen, and all that time the American held his fire. I thought that his guns had jammed and started to dive to his assistance, but remembering his emphatic orders, I decided to wait and watch. Suddenly the truth of the situation dawned upon me and cold beads of perspiration trickled under my helmet, caused by the realization of the nerve being displayed by the youth. Instead of shooting the German down when he held the advantage, Lawrence had passed up the chance and was now practicing maneuvering with a blood-seeking enemy.

Burst after burst the Jerry sent after the yellow plane only to see his tracers slide above or to the side of the elusive Yankee. Several times Lawrence got upon the Fokker's tail and hung on tenaciously. Do what he could the German could not shake off the faster plane that dived, banked, and zoomed as if it was a part of the man holding the stick.

At last Jerry decided that a cat was playing with a mouse, and that he was cast in the role of the latter. Realizing that discretion is the best part of valor, he sought an avenue of escape. Coming out of a fast zoom, he Immelmaned, fired a final ineffective burst at the American, then dived for home and safety. Down, down, down, he dived with the wind screaming through his wires and struts.

Fast in his wake was the yellow plane. When it seemed that manmade machines could no longer bear the strain, the Hun straightened out and for the first time the twin guns that fired through the propeller of the yellow plane, came into action. Tracers found the Fokker's tail, crawled up the fuselage, found the

cockpit; there was a small explosion, Lawrence had scored his first kill.

The American seemed satisfied with his day's work for he turned in a sea of Archie bursts and streaked for home. Trailing him, I reflected upon the explosion that had ended Jerry. I was convinced that it could not have been the gas tanks for the plane did not catch fire. It was several days later that I discovered the solution of the mystery.

A few minutes later I landed behind Lawrence on the home field. His two silent mechanics were there to receive him. I climbed from my plane elated and trotted over the yellow fighter, but stopped short at the scene which confronted me. Lawrence, white as a ghost, was trembling so he could hardly climb from his cockpit. My first impression was that he had been wounded, but he pushed me away and stumbled to his quarters.

"He's just like his plane, yellow, yellow all over!"

I turned to find the speaker and found my mechanic watching the stumbling figure and hissing under his breath.

Bewildered by what I had seen, I decided to see the thing through and to find out the trouble. I found Lawrence in a daze. He dropped into a chair and his head sunk into his arms laid across the table. Spasmodically his fingers ran through his hair. I was at a loss what to do. I had seen strange emotions portrayed by new pilots after their first kill, but here was a new kind of emotion to me.

SUDDENLY HE RAISED his face to me. Never have I seen a more tortured expression. He arose slowly, leaned over the table and grabbed me by the shoulders and in his eyes was the pleading question that was on his lips.

"Lieutenant," he begged, "did I—I—did I kill him?"

"Don't let it get you, kid." I tried to console him. "You only knocked an enemy out of the sky that was trying his best to get you. Why man, you looked like a veteran."

His fingers relaxed, his hands slid from my shoulders. The faint ray of hope that had reflected in his eyes faded and a look of utter despair crept upon his features. Slowly he backed away from me as if I was some horrible apparition. Backed against the wall he stopped and a wild almost insane look flashed in his eyes. I wilted under his terrorized gaze and nearly dropped when he screamed at me:

"I murdered him! He didn't have a chance—I am

murdering human beings, killing—slaughtering—that I might profit!”

He looked around the room like a beast at bay. Suddenly his gaze fell upon a bottle of strong drink. His eyes lighted and he made a dive for it as if it could sever the bonds that were holding him to his misery. When he had drained the contents, he dropped across the bed sobbing. A few minutes later he fell into a drunken slumber.

For hours he lay in a fitful state, mumbling, tossing restlessly and gripping the sheets until his knuckles were white. Again and again he fought the air duel over and it was late in the night before he awoke, and then he was a sick man.

For four days I doctored him and in that time I learned to know and to appreciate the turmoil that raged within his heart and soul.

The evening of the second day I sat by his bed reading poetry to him. He had a passion for poetry. A feeble hand pulled at my sleeve. I lowered the book and looked down into the red fever-stricken face. Behind the pain of physical suffering written in his eyes, I read the agony and turmoil that held sway within his soul.

“Lieutenant,” he whispered, “war is hell. It takes its toll in life, but, many of those living suffer far more than those that pay the supreme sacrifice.”

I was touched by his voice and by the realization that what he said was true. Knowing that he was speaking of himself, I replied:

“Lawrence, you are fighting two battles, one physically and the other mentally. Stop thinking of the past and face the future.”

He raised upon an elbow, there was pain in his reply.

“Lieutenant, you don’t know what you ask; you don’t know what this war has cost me.” He hesitated, a far away look came into his eyes and he continued:

“While I worked trying to build a plane for my country, patriotic fools, intoxicated with band music and waving flags, sneered at my secrecy. They called me slacker—said I was yellow—afraid to fight. I took their insults, I endured their hostility, but God—how I was suffering!”

He slumped back upon his pillow and for several minutes I knew that he was again living over the past.

His fists clenched, his breath came faster, a film of water was in his eyes. Choking back a sob, he continued:

“I endured the insults of those who did not

understand and to whom I couldn’t tell the truth, but another thing happened that nearly finished me. The girl I loved, my promised wife, fell victim to the general gossip, lost faith in me, was touched by the spirit of the patriotic mob and threw herself into the arms of a uniform.” His voice grew stronger. He was speaking directly to me.

“Lieutenant, I lived through the days following with one last aim in life: To finish my plane and see its kind shipped by dozens to the Front. At last it was finished and to you I say this, it exceeded my greatest hopes. Now I was ready to redeem myself and to let my accusers see that I also had love for my country. But again I met disappointment.

“The vision of a war for world democracy faded and I saw the war in its true colors. I found it to be an economic war, and the price of gain was blood. A grafting inspector was sent to pass on the merits of my fighter. When I refused to bribe him, he crossed me off his list and returned to make his report. I learned that he had reported my plane in the class with the average but with one feature ridiculously absurd. The hope that had buoyed my spirit faded and I was left without anything to cling to. I had planned; I had worked; I had failed.”

He had now worked himself up from dejection and self-pity into anger. He raised up in his bed and his voice vibrated with his internal wrath.

“You see the price I paid! Now you know what this war has cost me! When one’s country rewards sacrifice with indifference there is but one course to take and that is renunciation!”

HE GRITTED his teeth, his eyes flashed and his voice rose to an agonized, fiendish scream.

“America laughed at my sacrifices and now with God as my witness I denounce her as my country!”

A slight noise in the silence that followed caused me to look up. Two pursuit pilots of the squadron were standing in the doorway. They did not speak but turned and left. I knew that they had heard those last fatal words of Lawrence’s.

The victim turned and hid his face in the pillow. The suffering that he was enduring was now evident to me. My heart went out to him in spite of the statement that he had just made. I knew that it came from a tortured mind and not from an open soul.

That night he was very sick but the crisis passed and when morning came he was cool and reserved again. I talked and reasoned with him. My words had



their effect for at last he looked up at me and asked in a voice that made his question genuine:

“Be honest with me. Do you think that I was justified in my act? Do you think that I would be doing the right thing if I continued to shoot down German planes just to prove to the British Air Board that my plane is superior to other planes?”

“Lawrence,” I reasoned, “the Jerry was trying his best to get you. Self-defense would justify your act, but there is still a better way out. You are an American by birth regardless of your attitude now. America is at war with Germany and by every law of modern warfare, you are justified in killing enemies of your homeland.”

For an hour I reasoned with him. I revived the causes of the war and the disgraceful and inhuman acts of the Central Powers. At last I convinced him that Germany was an enemy of all mankind and the more he did in helping the Allies in a physical as well as a material way, the sooner the bloody struggle would be over. Meditation upon the subject developed in him a contempt for the Hun and his lust for power. Their bloody methods of warfare turned, that contempt to hatred and there awoke in him a desire to kill; to destroy.

Two days later he was up and for the first time I received a close-up of his master-plane. His eyes lighted with boyish pride as he pointed out the many original parts of his own creation, and it seemed that his hands lingered in a sort of fond caress on all the parts he touched. If a man ever loved a thing of steel-tubing and doped fabric, Lawrence loved that plane of his.

From tail skid to whirling metal prop I inspected the plane and found myself looking forward to the day when I might fly one in combat.

Of its many notable features, I shall call attention only to two of them.

Built directly under the cockpit, streamlined with the fuselage was a structure that contained a small gun. It was sighted with the twin machine guns and could be fired when he found the tracers of his machine guns eating into an enemy plane. It fired a small explosive shell that burst with sufficient force to disable any plane that it might hit. Next to speed and ease of maneuvering, he called this the strongest point of his plane, and sardonically he added:

“Once it was referred to as being ridiculously absurd.”

Realizing that his mind was traveling back to unpleasant memories, I changed the subject by asking

the use of a small switch which was planted just below the throttle though I had already guessed its use.

He placed his hand on it and laughed at the expression of alarm that o’erspread my countenance.

“I knew you were bluffing,” he laughed. “All planes have switches to explode them in case they fall into the hands of the enemy. Should I close this switch there would not be a piece of the plane left.”

I stood back and surveyed the plane. Small, compact, powerful, it squatted, a blind machine of death and destruction awaiting only the guiding hands of its master to dole its wares to the enemy.

“Lawrence, there’s one thing I don’t understand.”

“Shoot,” he replied.

“Why did you paint the crate yellow?”

A DARK SHADOW came over his features for a second, then he answered:

“They called me yellow at home.” His words were slow and full of meaning. “Yellow can be the color covering, or it can be the internal state. This plane is my creation—a kind of child; you see? It inherited its color. Germany had a ‘Red Ace’ and the world translated the color to mean blood. Who knows, perhaps the Allies will have a ‘Yellow Ace’? We’ll let the world decide the meaning of the color.”

And in the days following, the Yellow Ace became a reality. Across the skies of France and Germany he blazed his name and both friend and foe realized that the flashing demon had a history and that it was the spur of this past that made him the warrior that he was.

Small rumors of his past grew into fabulous tales and if they could all be collected, they would fill several volumes. But his true past, Lawrence confided only to myself:

I will not attempt to give an account of the specific happenings during the thirty days I was assigned to Lawrence, but I will say that he kept me in the air eight out of every twenty-four hours. High in the sky I rode watching him dive, attack, kill. Safely above the machine gun fire that he endured, I perched and watched him strafe German troops on the march, dive upon artillerymen at their guns, flash over the trenches spitting death from his powerful guns, and through it all he lived.

In the sky lone German aviators baited him hoping to lead him into a snare whereby a flight of Jerry planes might dive upon him and force him to the ground. The enemy wanted his plane and they wanted

it intact; its fighting qualities had been proven to the Hun.

But Lawrence was not caught, though time after time he escaped only because of the superiority of his plane and his own wonderful flying skill, and I might add that in these snares I was not completely ignored by the Jerry knights of the air.

Thus in the sky the American wrote, "Yellow Ace!" To many it was the color of a streak down his back. To those that really knew him, of which there were three, his two mechanics and myself, it was only the color of his plane.

Now when I picture Lawrence as others must have seen him, I realize that they had cause enough for disliking him. His quiet aloofness kept away would-be friends. Erratic action made others doubt him. Excessive drinking encouraged many to believe that he fought not on nerve but on stimulants. Many believed that I trailed him to protect his tail from enemy fliers, this having been the custom of other successful aces.

But the thing that caused the greatest dislike for him was the manner of fighting he drifted into. He began to use the tactics of great German aces, hiding in the sun or behind a cloud and dropping upon an unsuspecting enemy and shooting him down before he realized that death rode above him. Then there were the dog-fights into which he never dived and fought. When he chanced upon a twisting, turning, diving, zooming array of enemy and Allied planes he perched above and dropped like death itself upon some straggler. He explained to me that dog-fights were games of chance where ability of plane and skill of pilot did not always count.

"I have been called yellow before," he added, "and I am getting used to the *'nom de guerre'*."

The sarcastic smile on his face faded and a sad look crept into his eyes as he added:

"Sometimes I wonder if I am yellow. I am beginning to doubt myself."

Each evening as I wrote out the report of the day, Lawrence steadied his nerves with plenty of alcohol. He never associated with the other fliers and they never sought his companionship. Besides the other things they disliked about him, they learned of his attitude towards America, and being patriotic Englishmen, devoted to their King, they resented a man without a country.

To make a very bad situation worse, Lawrence incurred the hatred of the American squadron to the south. He would fly over their patrol route and when

he came upon an air duel between an American and a Jerry, he would hover above and when the Hun exposed himself, he would dive and rob the American of his antagonist.

THE AMERICAN SQUADRON discovered his identity, learned his attitude towards the States, and they not only marked him yellow, but branded him traitor. Every aviator of the American squadron hated him and I truly believe that had chance presented a suitable place and opportunity some of those men would have tried to knock him out of the sky.

But at the end of thirty days Lawrence was still alive though his yellow plane was of a decidedly different appearance. It had been patched in so many places that it resembled a crazy quilt. Regardless of its many scars of war the craft had not been hit in a vital spot and was still a monster of death and destruction.

Like his plane, Lawrence showed effects of those trying thirty days. His eyes were sunken, his cheek bones stood out. What the hell of flying had not done, the effects of excessive drinking had.

Each day I made out and handed in my reports. Before me now lie the carbon copies of those reports. Each is a story within itself and as I turn the pages, my mind goes back. I hear above the roar of motor the scream of wind rushing through wires and struts. I hear the steady staccato of machine gun fire and see planes circling, diving, zooming for position.

With a shudder I shake off the unpleasant sight and find more pleasant memories in the last two days of the Yellow Ace.

His plane was accepted by the British before the thirty days were up, and his two mechanics left immediately for America to supervise the manufacture of the sister planes.

Lawrence seemed reluctant about leaving the front. The spell of expectant waiting for something to happen had seized his being as it had the whole of Europe. The guarded quietness of the Allies was like the lull before the storm, something was bound to happen. With America now represented in force among the Allies, who could not hope that the Big Push, that long awaited offensive was near?

Guns, men, munitions of war, all were being moved up. Leaves were being cancelled and everything was being primed it seemed for that great stroke to end the war.

And such was the case. The Big Push was held up only because of the humane Allied Leaders who were

unwilling to sacrifice lives unnecessarily in the assault of Hildenburg Heights. The exposed crossing of the Meuse River confronted the American troops in whose line of activity the Heights came. Until they could capture the strategic position, neither the British on the north nor the French on the south could advance for fear of a break in the line.

The German High Command realized this and had fortified the ridge to a state which seemed impregnable. Giant guns from commanding and hidden locations covered the open river making the laying of pontoon bridges impossible. Her strongest air squadrons had been assembled here and were wiping the less experienced American fliers from the sky.

And now when all the eyes of the front were focused upon Hildenburg Heights, the key log of the Allied offensive, German ingenuity presented another new weapon into the war. It was a giant, rigid, observation balloon. It was made in sections and contained a gas that was non-inflammable. A small armoured structure on top was equipped with machine guns to keep off enemy planes. It was a veritable floating fortress and to insure its safety, special air patrols hovered above it at all times.

This giant balloon was the eyes of the German defense. From the car under the balloon, German observers could see miles in all directions and they were in direct communication with all German guns. The minute they saw something suspicious looking in Allied territory, they gave the range and for the next ten minutes a half-mile area would be raked by artillery fire.

The Allies were stumped. Hildenburg Heights must be captured. To capture the Heights meant the open crossing of the Meuse river. To cross the river was impossible until the giant guns had been silenced and the only way to silence them was to blindfold them. To do this meant the destroying of that new air fort, the eyes of the German defense.

ACE AFTER ACE, recklessly, courageously, gave their lives attempting to reach and to destroy that silent monster that hung in the sky tauntingly, laughing mockingly that it could hold at bay the whole Allied offensive.

At last the crisis came. The call went floating over France. Every capable Allied plane would take the air. The supremacy of the air must be wrestled from the Hun.

This call came on the last day of Lawrence's thirty days of free lancing. On the morrow he would be a civilian again and civilians were not allowed in the fighting area.

At mess that night the usual boisterousness was lacking. Every man knew what the morrow meant and all realized that this same group of men would never eat supper together again. Tomorrow night there would be vacant places. Whose, no one knew. That was in the hands of God.

Towards the last of the meal, Captain Fontain, leader of C Flight, arose and spoke. The effect of his voice in the quietness was like an exploding bomb. The men looked up startled, brought back to life and grim reality. Brought back from mother's embraces and sweetheart's kisses.

"Gentlemen," his voice was steady, "the C.O. has given permission for a short binge tonight. C Flight welcomes all of you. Come early for the limit is ten o'clock." The sky warriors relaxed. Tonight they would live again. For two short hours they would be allowed to forget the morrow.

During his stay at the front, Lawrence had never attended a binge, so it came as a great surprise when he said to me after supper: "Lieutenant, mind if I accompany you tonight?"

For courtesy's sake I had to reply in the affirmative though I well knew the cool reception he would receive from the other men.

An hour later we started for the binge. From the laughter and shouts of the men already gathered, one would not surmise that this was the last day on earth for many of them. We entered, merriment reigned supreme, the Eagles were living once more.

Lawrence was perfectly calm. He seemed not to be aware of the effects he produced upon the gathered fighters when they noticed his presence. His cool aloofness disappeared, he mingled with the men. His jokes were the funniest, his laughs the loudest. It seemed that the men were receiving him.

The time passed like magic. Before we knew it, the clock struck ten. Time was up, life was over, we were in the war again.

Before the men could settle back into thought again, Captain Fontain sprang upon the table. Raising a wine glass in the air he cried:

"Aces of the 23rd. To King George and Merry England!"

A deafening roar of approval followed his words and each man emptied a glass.

Before the last drop was drained, another figure sprang upon the table with glass raised. A sudden hush fell upon the crowd. All eyes were riveted upon the toast-maker. Tears streamed down his cheeks as he begged in a voice that sang from the bottom of his soul:

“To the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave! Gentlemen, drink to America!”

The other roar of approval was as a mere shout compared to the burst that followed his words. The Yellow Ace had won the 23rd.

Back at our quarters, Lawrence looked at me and smiled radiantly.

“Lieutenant, I am the happiest man in the world tonight!”

I grabbed his hand.

“Lawrence, old-timer, I knew you’d come through! I knew you were bluffing all the time!”

For an hour we talked and the words of that last conversation are sacred to me. The touch of his goodnight handshake still lingers, the last embrace of a very dear friend. As I crawled into my bunk he said to me:

“Lieutenant, my heart goes out to the ground forces that attack Hildenburg Heights at dawn. Unless our air forces can overcome the German squadrons and destroy that new balloon, thousands of boys will be killed unnecessarily.” His eyes took a faraway look and he added in a voice that yearned: “If they would just let me fly with the 23rd tomorrow; if they would just let me help!”

HE WENT BACK to his table and his war poems.

I lay in fitful slumber, half awake, half asleep. At times I was aware of the irritating tap-tap of Lawrence’s feet pacing the floor. At times I seemed to hear him murmuring far off, low like one talking to himself, or reciting poetry.

Why didn’t he stop walking? Why didn’t he quit murmuring? Why didn’t he go to bed and let a fellow sleep? These were my thoughts when my sergeant mechanic shook me into wakefulness one hour before dawn.

I looked around, Lawrence had gone. His book of poetry lay open upon the table, and his bed had not been slept in.

I dressed and went out on the field. All was bustle and activity. Orders were being yelled, men were running here and there, planes were being run out and motors were being warmed up.

Twenty minutes before dawn, I crawled into the cockpit of my plane. At the signal I left the ground in formation with my former flight. We banked to the south to join the Americans in their assault of Hildenburg Heights.

An unusual calm seemed to hang upon the earth. I seemed still to be in a dream, a most realistic dream, and try as I might I could not awaken. It seemed that the ancient gods had gathered in the sky and were awaiting the show that Mars was about to present. Slowly the curtain of darkness was lifting; the show would soon begin.

Fifteen minutes of flying and we were over the field of the American squadron. Out of the south came a French squadron and two flights of another British squadron. As we circled the field, the American ships climbed up one by one to finish the giant sky array that would be thrown against the flower of Germany’s air forces.

A powerful roar filled the heavens as the giant sky armada slowly headed across the Meuse into Hunland.

German hospitality was at its height and they gave us the warmest reception I have ever known. I had never realized that anti-aircraft guns could be so fierce, and never have I seen so many of these guns concentrated in one locality. Clearly it indicated the value they placed upon Hildenburg Heights.

As it began to grow light, tiny specks were outlined against the eastern sky. Coming to meet us made their approach doubly swift. From tiny specks they grew into large dragon-flies and then into rednosed Fokkers and three winged Albatrosses. Germany’s picked air-legions were coming to meet us; to stop us; that the great balloon hanging above the Heights might be safe to see and destroy the youth that was about to come into the open.

On the ground American youth crouched awaiting the word that would send them into the mouth of hell. Those thousands of Doughboys crouched there, tense and alert, with their eyes turned upward watching the two great air forces approach each other like two gigantic phantoms of the early dawn. In the hearts of all of them was a fervent prayer that some of those planes would be able to break through and destroy that monster that was watching them, waiting for them to come into the Open, that it might help destroy them.

And then, when it seemed that the eyes of the entire fighting world were focused upon the two approaching air forces, sudden heavy firing of anti-aircraft guns in the east caused the spectators to look for the cause.



The morning sun peeped over the horizon and like a meteor hurled from its yellow disc, a plane swept out of Germany. A youth had outplayed the Hun at his game of war. Already from a commanding height, the all yellow plane was diving upon the eyes of Hildenburg Heights while all around it shrapnel bursts reached with death-like fingers.

Frantically, German planes turned and attempted to head him off. One fast pursuit plane got within firing distance and opened fire. His first burst was wild and the next second he was a burning: corpse in a flaming plane.

With engine opened wide and diving straight down, the Yellow Ace made evident his intentions.

LIKE A PLUMMET he dropped, while German ships spewed lead at him and shrapnel burst in his path. From the upperdeck of the balloon a steady stream of lead went up to meet the oncoming demon. Frantically the enemy fired, madly they strove to prevent the catastrophe. Realizing that lead would not stop the plane, a courageous Jerry hurled his own plane into the path of the falling meteor in an attempt to smash it, but missed by inches.

A second later, the all yellow plane split into the vitals of the floating fortress and a split-second later a terrific explosion caused the giant balloon to break in halves and slowly fall, a mass of twisted inner-structure and burning canvas. The eyes of Hildenburg Heights had been, gouged out.

A shout, which not the guns could drown, floated up from the Yanks as they sprang into the open. Hell broke loose; guns long held silent, fearful of exposing their positions, broke into action. Pontoon bridges appeared like magic and over them the Khaki clad

boys from America rushed, inspired by the deed of one of their kind.

In the sky two of the greatest air forces ever collected came together with guns spewing lead and motors pinging the battle song of the sky. Dusk came, the first act of the play was over. The great offensive had begun, and the enemy had been ousted from the sky. Over Hildenburg Heights, the Stars and Stripes of America floated.

Weary of mind and body, I stumbled into what had been our quarters. In a daze I looked around. Why wasn't Lawrence there? Why wasn't the youth sitting there at his table reading poetry? A few hours before he had been there, and even now his book lay open at the poem he had last been reading.

Like a dumb creature the book lay there beckoning, and long invisible arms reached out entreatingly. Slowly I was pulled towards the table. In a trance I moved, knowing that I was about to look upon the last thoughts of the Yellow Ace.

I reached the table and my eyes fell upon the title of the poem Lawrence had last read; "I have a rendezvous with Death," famous poem of a renowned British warrior. The spell was broken. Out of the dawn a yellow plane was diving upon a giant balloon while thousands looked on. I also was a spectator, but I looked past the whirling prop and spitting guns.

I looked into the cockpit and saw a youth with clenched teeth and knitted brow, whose eyes, though wet with tears, shone with the purpose of self-sacrifice. One hand clenched the stick, the other closed over a small switch just under the throttle. The plane split into the vitals of the floating fortress and I saw the hand jam home the switch. The Yellow Ace had redeemed himself.