

You Too, Snoopy

by Michael Brian Oliver

One of my greatest thrills
When I was twelve
Was meeting C. Fred Crawley,
C. Fred Crawley is forgotten now
But I remember him, I remember the
Old gentleman.

I remember him telling me
And my best friend
How he flew in World War One
A British SE-5
With a Lewis machine gun synchronized
To fire through the prop,
But I already knew – I had the plastic model,
And I read it in a book besides.
Yes I remember the boys he said
Billy Bishop and Edward Mannings
And he smiled, but he looked glassy-eyed,
I remember he said.
How many planes did you shoot down? I said
Were you an ace?
He nodded, but didn't speak; he was an ace
And I was glad.

I was always an ace when I was above France
In my trusty plane
That I made with egg-crates from my father's store;
The faucet-knob trigger
Of my machine guns blazed as I duelled with Germans
Up where the wind
Took your breath and I had to shout back
To the second cockpit
So my friend could hear me, if I was flying a two-seater.

Did you know Albert Ball? I asked
No I didn't the old gentleman said, he died before me.
I was kind of sorry
For Albert Ball was my favourite; he flew a Nieuport
And didn't wear a cap,
He liked to feel the wind blowing through his hair
And so did I.
The old gentleman lent me a book all about
The First World War flyers.
My friend and I read it through – all four hundred pages –
At night,
Then in the day we would be out flying and fighting;
I pretended
I was Albert Ball who one day flew into a cloud bank
And was never seen again.