

Humors of the Air Service

Written for The Western Home Monthly by W. R. Gilbert.

ONE of the peculiarities of all wars is that one hears quite as much of the humorous side as of the tragic. Presumably this is one sort of compensation, because nobody could go through a war with his eye only on the tragic side and retain his reason. However, the fact remains that if you talk to any soldier who has been through a big campaign he will tell you any amount of stories of the comic things that have happened, and very little of the unpleasantness.

Much of the same thing is happening in this war, and I find that our flying men are not only very light-hearted in the way they go about their work, but are quite amusing in their accounts of what they have actually done. A good many of their stories have come my way, as several relatives are serving in the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Air Force, and their yarns struck me as worth jotting down.

One of the most amusing things that has happened to any aviator as yet occurred at the very beginning of the war. The hero is an English officer who has since distinguished himself very highly, but who in this particular instance must not be indicated any more definitely.

Before the war the Air Department of the British Admiralty, always keen on giving a fair trial to anybody who showed signs of originality, bought a big German bi-plane, built at Leipzig, familiarly known as the D.F.W. It is a heavy, large, and stately machine, and with its swept-back wings, it simply shouted "German" to anybody who had any knowledge of aeroplanes at all. Nevertheless, it is quite a good flier if

one gives it time to get off the ground, and has done a number of very good, long-distance flights. Since after the declaration of war, the officer who was flying this machine was ordered up to the North of England, and on his way he came down to lunch on the race-course of a certain town.

It so happened that a civilian aviator who knew him and the machine rather well happened to be staying in that particular town, and hearing the noise of an engine, looked up and saw the D.F.W. majestically descending. Thereupon he hurried up to the race-course as being the only place where it was likely to land, and on arriving there found that a company of Regular infantry stationed near had rushed to the course to look at the aeroplane, and seeing the German name on the machine promptly arrested the pilot as a German service aviator. Of course, he protested that he was a British officer, but one can hardly expect the average mud-crusher of the line to recognize as a British uniform a kit which begins at the top with a leather helmet, proceeding downwards through a Naval Air Service jacket with brass buttons, which is precisely the same as this ordinary naval jacket, and finish up with the riding breeches, puttees, and hob-nailed boots. Consequently, the pilot was hauled off promptly to the police station and shoved in the cells.

On arriving, the civilian aviator, who was well known in the town, managed to persuade the officer in command of the troops, that his friend was really a Naval aviator, and further evidence was produced in the form of a mess bill, which the pilot had in his pocket from one of the Naval Air stations. When

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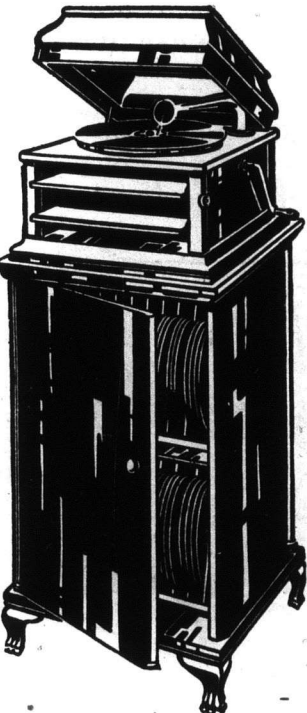
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