

THE ROMANCE OF AIR-FIGHTING.

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The Finest Air Story Of The War.

In May, 191, a correspondent of the London "Times" described the most remarkable air battle that the War has produced. It happened on a day of great heat, when the haze was so thick that one could hardly see the ground from a height of 2,000 feet. At 5 p.m., five British aeroplanes were well over the enemy country, when they saw two enemy machines ahead, and tried to close with them. These two were decoys, bent on luring the British flotilla far from its base, and, as soon as they were chased, German air fleets came closing in in three formations of eight, eight, and nine machines, twenty-seven machines in all, counting the two decoys. The fight began at 11,000 feet, and afterwards ranged from 3,000 to 12,000 feet up and down the ladders of heaven. It lasted a full hour—an extraordinary time for five machines to "stick it out" against twenty-seven. In a few minutes, three of the German aeroplanes had gone down crashing or in flames. Then the British luck seemed to turn, and the engine of Lieutenant B. gave out. Another Lieutenant saw his crippled comrade slipping downwards and a German diving after him to finish him. Quick as a flash, he followed, and in another second the pursuing German turned clean over in the air and went down nose foremost. By a miracle, Lieutenant B's engine now caught its breath again, and he climbed up 8,000 feet to rejoin his formation, just in time to see some more Germans fall. One of the British machines then began to drop, with flames bursting from its reserve petrol-tank, but, fortunately, it made a "topping" landing, as the men on the ground said. Will it be believed that, before this extraordinary battle had ended, four more Germans came utterly to grief? Altogether eight German machines were absolutely destroyed, and yet only one British plane had been burned, and the other four British, still lords of the air, came home with bullet-holes in their aeroplanes and dents on their spars, but otherwise none the worse for their fight with the twenty-seven.

The Airman's Life.

Only part of the aviator's time has to be devoted to routine work and "stunts". He has his social

life, and a merry time it is, with a full dose of the 'joie de vivre'. "Bird-men" are the best company in the world; they are the cream of society, and yet modest; they love practical jokes and are always cheerful without being inane; they are well-informed, and do not indulge in a pedantic display of their information.

As regards the risks attendant upon ordinary flying, it may be interesting to quote from an article written in hospital by a British Lieutenant (Royal Air Force), after an accident caused by too sudden a descent. "A crash," he writes, "can always be explained; I could explain mine. If the laws of flight are obeyed, if engines work, if stress and strain are well calculated—and, it must be added, if the human element is dependable then flying is as safe as lying in a hammock." Apart from war work, the proportion of accidents to thousands of miles flown has been enormously reduced. We cannot make aviation as safe as golf or fishing, but it is certainly as safe as many of the pastimes of the sportsman. For instance, from the standpoint of control, the aeroplane is superior to the sailing boat or the balloon, and it beats the horse hollow.

Sportsmen have said that the finest sport in the world is galloping down lions. The definition must be revised. The finest sport to-day is to ascend to the upper atmosphere and assist there in the supreme task of defeating the world's tyrants.

THE SECOND 'OUSE.

An attack by the Boches being expected, some men of a London regiment had been kept in reserve for nearly twenty hours in an underground excavation, which more closely resembled a tunnel than a trench. It was almost dark, inches deep in water, and the men—cold and cramped by reason of the fact that it was absolutely impossible to stand up straight—were physically miserable, if mentally cheerful. They were relieved at night by men from another regiment, and as they were filing out of this "hole" one of the new arrivals inquired of an out-coming man:

"Who are you?" meaning, of course, which regiment? The questioned man was possibly a frequenter of entertainments where two performances are given nightly, for he replied sourly:

"'Oo are we? Can't you see? We're the second 'ouse a-comin' aht of the pit."

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