

FEATURE AND
CITY SECTION

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WAR
PAGES
WAR

The Most Remarkable Death Pact of History

**Group of French
Aviators Have
Sworn a Remarkable
Oath to Combat
the Formidable
Zeppelin Dirigible
by Committing
Deliberate Suicide
in One Single Swoop
From the Clouds—
"To Do and Die" is
Their Watchword.**

SINCE the beginning of the war Germany has lost three of its mighty Zeppelin dirigibles. One of these was shot to the ground by the guns of the Belgian forts, which it sought to destroy, the others were annihilated by Frenchmen in a way that has led the world to wonder at the reckless carelessness of the perpetrators. It wonders whether Roland Garros, the French aviator, deliberately sacrificed his life to destroy the huge monarch of the air that dropped to the ground after his little monoplane had plowed its way into its silk covering. While Frenchmen are rejoicing at the calamities that have befallen these German giants, and are worshipping the heroes that are obtaining revenge for past wrongs, the rest of the world is wondering whether it shall believe or disbelieve reports that these aviators are members of one of the most remarkable death pacts in history.

This organization, a veritable suicide club, is one of the strangest groups of men ever bound together by oath. It is made up of French army officers, who, realizing the terrible peril to their nation, that the ever more perfect Zeppelin is becoming, have decided to adopt the only way they see to avert this menace to their country. These mighty Zeppelins, capable of dropping from an enormous height bombs large enough to destroy a whole city, or compel the surrender of forts or sink war-ships, must be destroyed, and these men have made a covenant to give their own lives whenever that might become necessary in order to bring them to earth.

Roland Garros, the first member to abide by the covenant, was flying at Belmont Park, New York, three or four years ago, and even at that time let words slip by his almost morose lips that hinted at the existence of the aviators' death pact. Capt. Horace B. Wild, an American army aviator, who was quite intimate with the late French martyr, relates some of his experiences with Garros as follows:

"It was during the international aviation meet at Belmont Park, in 1910, that I first became intimately

There are only two ways of successfully putting out of commission the famous German dirigibles which can scatter destruction as no other engine of war yet invented can — by shattering the huge balloon with a well-aimed shell from the sea or from land, or by ramming it full-force with an aeroplane. The latter way means certain death for the assailant as well as the assailant.

acquainted with Garros," said Capt. Wild. "We were thrown together a great deal, and I soon grew to have a great respect for this unusual character, full of body and nervous in temperament, but with a heart of iron and an intense earnestness that could not fail to impress anybody thrown in to his company. He was so serious as to appear almost morose—to suggest that he might be worrying about some bodily ailment or threatened personal calamity. Often he stood apart from the rest of us as if wrapped in deep study, trying to decide a way out of some grave situation. In the light of what I afterwards learned I can now readily account for those moods in the man who, even then, practically had offered himself up as a sacrifice on the altar of his country."

"It was one night when a group of us sat chatting on the hotel verandah that Garros first dropped a remark which directly hinted at the existence of the group of patriots to which I have alluded. In the party was Israel Ludlow, whose machine had fallen a few days before. He was on crutches, paralysed from the hips down, and remarked mournfully, that had he followed his wife's pleas and remained out of the flying game, he might now be a well man. Others commented upon the unhappiness that our calling imposed upon our wives, and then some-

one asked Garros if he was glad he did not have a wife to worry about him.

"I shall never marry," he said gravely. "I have a service to perform for my country, and when I die there shall be no widow to mourn over me."

"In subsequent conversations with various people, Garros and others have told of the service they consider they owe their country. It was their intention when occasion arose to combat the menace of the German dirigible by the simple expedient of committing deliberate suicide in a single plunge from the clouds. They thought that it was worth the sacrifice, and this is the argument they used to make others think so too."

"A Zeppelin machine costs a million francs and requires four months to construct. It has on board from ten to twenty men whom it has cost the German government thousands of dollars to train at great risk, over a long period of time, for these Zeppelin pilots cannot become efficient in the scientific manoeuvring of these machines until after years of continuous practice. In estimating what one of these machines will be able to do in time of war, bear in mind its cost—millions of francs that the German government has spent in building the craft, the expenses of each individual connected with it, the time it will take to duplicate it, and the cost. In juxtaposition to this consider one of us. An individual man, just one soul, with the aid of one little aeroplane, costing only 25,000 francs, and readily constructed, can if necessary drop right down on one of these German war dogs and totally destroy it, machine and man, wipe it out of existence utterly. Is it not worth the sacrifice of a single life? Are we doing anything more than our duty when we pledge ourselves to live up to this agreement?"

On account of the fact that dirigibles carry rapid-firing guns which can be aimed with deadly accuracy it is impossible for a monoplane to approach them from any side. But a dirigible cannot go higher than about 5000 feet, and this is where the monoplane, able to ascend to almost any height, is able to make the fatal plunge. The dirigibles have the further advantage of using silencers on their engines, and of being able to remain stationary in the air. Neither of which is at present possible for the aeroplane, although silencers are being tested for their use. The little war bird then has but one avenue of approach, that from directly above. This expanse of sky above the dirigible is always concealed from the crew, as the great belly of the ship floating above cuts off their view.

Waiting their chance then, these members of this death pact figure fifteen thousand feet or ten, maybe fifteen thousand feet drop down on the unsuspecting monsters beneath them who are themselves waiting to deal death in turn to others beneath them. It will be a certain death to the brave pilot of the tiny monoplane but they have figured the sides and they are an equation.

Who said that the spectacular in war had vanished? One of these giant Zeppelins is floating silently, unconsciously of danger, thousands of feet in the air, and away above it after having ascended to an altitude several thousand feet higher than the dirigible, is the little monoplane manoeuvring to get a place directly above its victim. Once securing this position, which shuts him off from the observation of those in the dirigible the pilot cuts off his ignition, points the nose of the machine directly at the backbone of the great and vulnerable engine of war below him and in a spectacular shot from the skies plunges down and tends to atoms the huge craft in his path.

Germany has thirty-three of these dirigibles. France has 3000 aeroplanes with almost as many brave aeronauts. It is easy to see that if the objects of this death pact are attained the balance of power in the end will rest with the country upon whose altar brave armies have already sacrificed their lives.



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3.30 p.m.



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