

THE ROMANCE OF AIR-FIGHTING.

(Continued from page 2)

miles behind the enemy's front line, and of the zig-zag ramifications of the enemy trenches. Piecing the sections together, a commander has ready to hand a kind of ordnance survey map of the whole of the enemy's territory. Of course, the old-fashioned ordinary camera is quite out of date; to-day, a special telephoto lens is held at the shoulder and aimed at the scenery as a man aims a gun at a bird, or, in other cases, a camera hangs below the plane and, automatically, by the mere pressure of a button, takes whatever landscape is being travelled over.

Wireless telegraphy is an immense aid to aerial reconnaissance. By wireless means the aviator now directs and corrects artillery fire, reports the disposition and movements of troops, and flashes back warnings of sudden emergencies. Men in the Royal Naval Air Service have heavier responsibilities of a long-distance nature; the wireless work that they carry out over extensive stretches of sea is invaluable to the Fleet, and to the Anti-Aircraft command on shore.

Let us now regard the aviator purely as a combatant. Bomb-dropping may seem a fairly easy game to play. Will it surprise anyone to learn that it has to be elaborately studied as a separate art? The bomber who hits such objects as a railway train, a convoy of motor lorries, or a submarine on the surface of the water, is a genius. If he gets on his objective in a fair proportion of attempts, he is probably a man who has studied diligently the theory of falling bodies and the exact effect of his aeroplane's speed on the parabola described by his bomb in its descent. Should an aerial bombardment be undertaken by a squadron of machines, success or failure may depend entirely on special manoeuvring, quite distinct from that involved in ordinary scouting. Finally, the air-fighter must be competent to use a light machine-gun rapidly and accurately, and know how to circle and dodge around cleverly in an engagement with a flying adversary so as to get him placed at an angle at which a "bead" can effectively be drawn upon him.

Duellists Of The Air

Here we touch upon the one thing that distinguishes battles in the air from all the other fighting

in this War. It is the revival of the honourable courtesies of the duel—nay, more, the revival of the ancient chivalry of the Knight Templars. As he soars aloft, the airman has at the back of his mind the idea that he is out to meet a champion belonging to the same knightly order as himself, one possessing qualities resembling his own—trained skill, daring, the power of swift decision. In most of the land fighting the enemy's personality is indistinct, perhaps entirely invisible. The gunner who fires shells from afar off can hardly command our respect in any particular degree. The sniper, industrious as he may be, is no very heroic figure. The military chemist, projecting his gas waves, is a comic creature if he fail in his plan and a somewhat revolting sort of foe if he succeed. Even in the bayonet charge, where the combatants do at least face one another, the gallant deed is to a great extent merged in the rough-and-tumble of the crowd.

It is quite otherwise in the air. From their respective hangars Ivanhoe and Sir Brian de Bois-Guilbert sally forth to personal combat. Each has his machine-gun couched along the upper ridge of the fuselage of his mount and pointed at his antagonist. Each knows that on the quick manoeuvring for position and on the ingenious anticipation of the other's movements the issue of the fight mainly depends. Now consider the feelings of the victor, as he sees his adversary hurtling down to the ground. Did any tournament of old provide encounter more picturesque or more sublime?

Although the aviator detests the Government and system with whom he is at war, his own particular calling appears to him so noble that he can manage to retain some shreds of respect for the aerial foeman who comes out against him. When the youth Immelman, after a long series of triumphant duels, lay dead himself in the lists, the British honoured his memory by despatching one of their aeroplanes with a wreath to be dropped over the German trenches. Again, when two British airmen failed to return from an exploit on the Balkan front, the enemy hastened to dispel anxiety as to their fate. "Your brave men are safe," said a message that fell from an enemy machine.

Incidentally, it may be mentioned here that no honourable aviator attacks an aeroplane that is already on fire. Such a foe has enough trouble to deal with; he is regarded as out of the fight.

(To be concluded next week)

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