

HIGH ADVENTURE. IV

BY JAMES NORMAN HALL

I

SOMEWHERE to the north of Paris, in the *zone des armées*, there is a village, known to all aviators in the French service as G.D.E. It is the *dépôt* through which pilots who have completed their training at the aviation schools pass on their way to the front; and it is here that I again take up this journal of aerial adventure.

We are in lodgings, Drew and I, at the Hôtel de la Bonne Rencontre, which belies its name in the most villainous fashion. An inn at Rochester, in the days of Henry the Fourth, must have been a fair match for it; and yet there is something to commend it other than its convenience to the flying field. Since the early days of the Escadrille Lafayette, many Americans have lodged here while awaiting their orders for active service. As I write, J. B. is asleep in a bed which has done service for a long line of them. It is for this reason that he chose it, in preference to one in a much better state of repair which he might have had. And he has made plans for its purchase after the war. Madame Rodet is to keep careful record of all its American occupants, just as she has done in the past. She is pledged not to repair it beyond the bare necessity which its uses as a bed may require — an injunction which it was hardly necessary to lay upon her, judging by the other furniture in our apartment. Drew is not sentimental, but he sometimes carries sentiment to extremities which appear to me absurd.

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When I attempt to define, even to myself, the charm of our adventures thus far, I find it impossible. How, then, make it real to others? To tell of aerial adventure, which is so gloriously new, one needs a new language — or, at least, a parcel of new adjectives, sparkling with bright and vivid meaning, as crisp and fresh as just-minted banknotes. They should have no taint of flatness or insipidity. They should show not the faintest trace of wear. With them, one might hope now and then to startle the imagination, and to set it running in channels which are strange and delightful to it. For there is something new under the sun — aerial adventure; and the most lively and unjaded fancy may at first need direction toward the realization of this astounding fact. Soon it will have a literature of its own — of prose and poetry, of fiction, biography, memoirs; of history which will read like romance. The essayists will turn to it with joy. The poets will discover new aspects of beauty which have been hidden from them through the ages; and as men's experience 'in the wide fields of air' increases, epic material which will tax their most splendid powers.

This brings me sadly back to my own purpose, which is, despite many wistful longings of a more ambitious nature, to write a plain tale of the adventures of two members — prospective up to this point — of the Escadrille Lafayette. To go back to some of those earlier ones, when we were making our first cross-country flights,

I remember them now with a delight which at the time was not unmixed with other emotions. Indeed, an aviator, and a fledgling aviator in particular, often runs the whole gamut of human feeling during a single flight. I did, in the course of half an hour, reaching the high C of acute panic as I came tumbling out of the first cloud of my aerial experience. Fortunately, in the air the sense of equilibrium usually compels one to do the right thing; and so, after some desperate handling of my 'broom-stick,' as the control is called, which governs *ailerons* and elevating planes, I soon had the horizons nicely adjusted again.

What a relief it was! I shut down my motor and commenced a more gradual descent; for I was lost, of course, and it seemed to be wiser to land and make inquiries, than to go cruising over half of France looking for one picturesque old town among hundreds of such. There were at least a dozen within view. Some of them were a three-hours' walk distant from each other. But in the air! I was free to go whither I would and swiftly.

After leisurely deliberation I selected one surrounded by wide fields which appeared to be as level as a floor. But, as I descended, the landscape widened, billowing into hills and folding into valleys. By sheer good luck, nothing more, I made a landing without accident. My Caudron barely missed colliding with a hedge of fruit trees, rolled down a long incline, and stopped not ten feet short of a small stream. The experience taught me the folly of choosing landing ground from high altitudes. I need not have landed, of course; but I was then so much an amateur that the buffeting of various currents of air near the ground awed me into it, come what might. The village was out of sight over the crest of the hill. However, thinking that some one

must have seen me, I decided to await developments where I was.

Very soon I heard a shrill, jubilant shout. A boy of eight or ten years was running along the ridge as fast as he could go. Outlined against the sky, he reminded me of silhouettes I had seen in Paris shops, of children dancing, the very embodiment of joy in movement. He turned and waved to some one behind, whom I could not see, then came on again, stopping a short distance away, and looking at me with an air of awe, which, having been a small boy myself, I was able to understand and appreciate. I said, 'Bonjour, mon petit,' as cordially as I could; but he just stood there and gazed without saying a word.

Then the others began to appear: scores of children, and old men as well, and women of all ages, some with babies in their arms, and young girls. The whole village came, I am sure. I was mightily impressed by a haleness in the old men and women, which one rarely sees in America. Some of them were evidently well over seventy, and yet, with one or two exceptions, they had healthy complexions, clear eyes, and sound limbs. As for the young girls, many of them were exceptionally pretty; and the children were sturdy youngsters, not the wan, thin-legged little creatures one sees in Paris. In fact, all of these people appeared to belong to a different race from that of the Parisians — to come from finer, more vigorous stock.

They were very curious, but equally courteous, and stood in a large circle around my machine, waiting for me to make my wishes known. For several minutes, I pretended to be busy attending to dials and valves inside the car. While trying to screw my courage up to the point of making a verbless explanation of my difficulty, some one pushed through the crowd, and, to my

great relief, began speaking to me. It was monsieur the mayor. As best I could, I explained that I had lost my way and had found it necessary to come down for the purpose of making inquiries. I knew that it was awful French, but hoped that it would be intelligible, in part at least. However, the mayor understood not a word, and I knew by the curious expression in his eyes that he must be wondering from what weird province I hailed. After a moment's thought he said, 'Vous êtes Anglais, monsieur?' with a smile of very real pleasure. I said, 'Non, monsieur, Américain.'

That magic word! What potency it has in France — the more so at that time, perhaps, for America had placed herself definitely on the side of the Allies only a very short time before. Frankly, I did enjoy that moment. I might have had the village for the asking. I willingly accepted the rôle of ambassador of the American people. Had it not been for the language barrier, I think I would have made a speech, for I felt the generous spirit of Uncle Sam prompting me to give those fathers and mothers, whose husbands and sons were at the front, the promise of our unqualified support. I wanted to tell them that we were with them now, not only in sympathy, but with all our resources in men and guns and ships and aircraft. Alas! this was impossible. Instead, I gave each one of an army of small boys the privilege of sitting in the pilot's seat, and showed them how to manage the controls.

The astonishing thing to me was, that while this village was not twenty kilometres off the much-frequented air route between C—— and R——, mine was the first aeroplane which most of them had seen. During long months at various aviation schools I had grown accustomed to thinking that aircraft were as familiar a sight to others as to

us. And yet here was a village not far distant from several aviation schools, where a pilot was looked upon with wonder. To have an American aviator drop down upon them was an event, even in the history of that ancient village. To have been that aviator — well, it was an unforgettable experience, coming as it did so opportunely with America's entry into the war. I shall always have it in the background of memory, and, if health and fortune hold good, it will be one of the pleasantest of many pleasant tales I shall have in store for my grandchildren.

However, it is not their potentialities as memories which endear these adventures of ours now. Rather, it is their contrast to any that we have known before. We are always comparing this new life with the old, so different in every respect as to seem a separate existence, almost a previous incarnation.

Having been set right about my course, I pushed my biplane to more level ground, with the willing help of all the boys, started my motor, and was away again. Their cheers were so shrill and hearty that they reached me even above the roar of the motor. As a lad in a small, middle-western town, I have known the rapture of holding to a balloon guy-rope at a country fair, until the world's most famous aeronaut shouted, 'Let 'er go, boys!' and swung off into space. I kept his memory green until I had passed the first age of hero-worship. I know that every youngster in a small village in central France will so keep mine. Such fame is the only kind worth having.

A flight of fifteen minutes brought me within sight of the large white circle which marks the landing field at R——. J. B. had not yet arrived. This was a great disappointment, for we had planned a race home. I was anxious about him, too, for I knew that the godfather

of all adventurers can be very stern at times, particularly with his aerial god-children. I waited an hour, and then decided to go on alone. The weather having cleared, the opportunity was too favorable to be lost.

The cloud-formations were the most remarkable that I had ever seen. I flew around and over and under them, watching at close quarters the play of light and shade over their great billowing folds. Sometimes I skirted them so closely that the current of air from my propeller raveled out fragments of shining vapor, which streamed into the clear spaces like wisps of filmy silk. I knew that I ought to be savoring this experience, but for some reason I could not. One usually pays for a fine mood by a sudden and unaccountable change of feeling which shades off into a kind of dull, colorless depression.

I passed a twin-motor Caudron going in the opposite direction. It was fantastically painted — the wings a bright yellow and the circular hoods over the two motors a fiery red. As it approached, it looked like some prehistoric bird with great ravenous eyes. The thing startled me, not so much because of its weird appearance, as by the mere fact of its being there. Strangely enough, for a moment it seemed impossible that I should meet another *avion*. Despite a long apprenticeship in aviation, in these days when one's mind has only begun to grasp the fact that the mastery of the air has been accomplished, the sudden presentation of a bit of evidence sometimes shocks it into a moment of amazement bordering on incredulity.

As I watched the big biplane pass, it was with relief that I became conscious of a feeling of loneliness. I remembered what J. B. had said that morning. There *was* something unpleasant in that isolation, something to make one look longingly down to earth; to make

one wonder whether we shall ever feel really at home in the air. I, too, longed for the sound of human voices, and all that I heard was the roar of the motor and the swish of the wind through wires and struts — sounds which have no human quality in them, and are no more companionable than the lapping of the waves would be to a man adrift on a raft in mid-ocean. Underlying this feeling, and, no doubt, in part responsible for it, was the knowledge of the fallibility of that seemingly perfect mechanism which rode so steadily through the air; of the quick response which that ingenious arrangement of inanimate matter would make to an eternal, inexorable law, if a few frail wires should part; of the equally quick, but less phlegmatic response of another fallible mechanism, capable of registering horror, capable, it is said, of passing its past life in review in the space of a few seconds, and then — capable of becoming equally inanimate matter.

Luckily nothing of this sort happened, and the feeling of loneliness passed the moment I came in sight of the long rows of barracks, the hangars and machine-shops of the aviation school. My joy when I saw them can be appreciated in full only by fellow aviators who remember the end of their own first long flight. I had been away for years. I would not have been surprised to find great changes. If the brevet monitor had come hobbling out to meet me holding an ear-trumpet in his palsied hand, the sight would have been quite in keeping with my own sense of the lapse of time. However, he approached with his ancient, springy, businesslike step, as I climbed down from my machine. I swallowed to clear the passage to my ears, and heard him say, 'Alors, ça va?' in a most disappointingly perfunctory tone of voice.

I nodded.

'Where's your biograph?'

My biograph! It is the altitude-registering instrument which also marks, on a cross-lined chart, the time consumed on each lap of an aerial voyage. My card should have shown four neat outlines in ink, something like this —



one for each stage of my journey, including the forced landing when I had lost my way. But alas! having started the mechanism going on leaving A—, I had then forgotten all about it, so that it had gone on running while my machine was on the ground, as well as during the time it was in the air. The result was a sketch of a magnificent mountain-range, which might have been drawn by the futurist son, age five, of a futurist artist. Silently I handed over the instrument. The monitor looked at it, and then at me, without comment. But there is an international language of facial expression, and his said, unmistakably, 'You poor, simple prune! You choice sample of mouldy American cheese!'

J. B. did not return until the following afternoon. After leaving me over C—, he had blown out two spark-plugs. For a while he limped along on six cylinders, then landed in a field three kilometres from the nearest town. His French, which is worse, if that is possible, than mine, aroused the suspicions of a sturdy patriot farmer who collared him as a possible German spy. Under a bodyguard of two peasants armed with hoes, he was marched to a neighboring château. And then, I should think, he must have had another historical illusion, this time with a French revolutionary setting. He says not, however. All his faculties were concentrated on enjoying this unusual adventure; and he was wonder-

ing what the outcome of it would be.

At the château he met a fine old gentleman who spoke English with that nicety of utterance which only a cultivated Frenchman can achieve. He had no difficulty in clearing himself. Then he had dinner in a great hall hung with armor and hunting trophies, was shown to a chamber half as large as the lounge at the Harvard Club, and slept in a bed which he got into by means of a ladder of carved oak. This is a mere outline. Out of regard for J. B.'s opinions about the sanctities of his own personal adventures, I refrain from giving further details.

Our final triangle was completed uneventfully. J. B.'s motor behaved splendidly; I remembered my biograph at every stage of the journey, and we were at home again within three hours. We did our altitude tests and were then no longer *élèves-pilotes* but *pilotes-aviateurs*. By reason of this distinction, we passed from the rank of soldier of the second class to that of corporal. We hurried to the tailor's, where the wings and star insignia were sewn on our collars and our corporal's stripes on our sleeves. For we were proud, as every aviator is proud, who reaches the end of his apprenticeship and enters into the dignity of breveted military pilot.

II

Six months have passed since I made the last entry in my journal. J. B. was asleep in his historic bed, and I was sitting at a rickety table, writing by candle-light, stopping now and then to listen to the mutter of guns on the Aisne front. It was only at night that we could hear them, and then not often, the very ghost of sound, as faint as the beating of the pulses in one's ears. That was a May evening, and now it is late in November. I arrived at the Gare du Nord only a few hours ago.

Never before have I come to Paris with so keen a sense of the joy of living. I walked down rue Lafayette, then through rue de Provence and rue du Havre, to a little hotel in the vicinity of the Gare St. Lazare. Under ordinary circumstances not one of these streets, or the people in them, would have appeared particularly interesting; but on this occasion it was the finest walk of my life. I saw everything with the enchanted eyes of the *permissionnaire*, and sniffed the odors of roasting chestnuts, of restaurants, of shops, and of people, never so keenly aware of their numberless variety.

After dinner I walked out on the boulevards from the Madeleine to the Place de la République, through the maze of narrow streets, to the river, and over Pont Neuf to Notre Dame. I was amazed that the enchantment which Hugo gives it for me should have lost none of its old potency, after coming direct from the tremendous realities of modern warfare. If he were writing this journal, what a story it would be! I ought to give it up, but that second self which is always urging one to do impossible things, keeps saying, 'Of course it's absurd. I grant you that you're not big enough for the job. But don't be too ambitious. Remember what you started in to do: "Simple narrative—two members—Escadrille Lafayette." Tell it as it falls out of your pen. Who asks you to do more than that?'

It will be necessary to pass rapidly over the period between the day when we received our *brevets militaires* and that on which we started for the front. The event which bulked largest to us was, of course, the departure on active service. Preceding it, and next in importance, was the last phase of our training and the culmination of it all at the School of Acrobacy. Preliminary to our work there, we had a six-weeks

course of instruction, first on the twin-motor Caudron and then on various types of the Nieuport biplane. We thought the Caudron a magnificent machine. We liked the steady throb of its powerful motors, the enormous spread of its wings, the slow, ponderous way it had of answering to the controls. It was our business to take officer observers for long trips about the country while they made photographs, spotted dummy batteries, and perfected themselves in the wireless code.

At that time the Caudron had almost passed its period of usefulness at the front, and there was a prospect of our being transferred to the yet larger and more powerful Léotard, a three-passenger biplane carrying two machine-guns besides the pilot, and from three to five machine-guns. This appealed to us mightily. J. B. was always talking of the time when he would command not only a machine, but also a 'gang of men.' However, being Americans, and recruited for a particular combat corps which flies only single-seater *avions de chasse*, we eventually followed the usual course of training for such pilots. We passed in turn to the Nieuport biplane, which compares in speed and grace with these larger craft, as the flight of a swallow with the movements of a great lazy buzzard. And now the Nieuport has been surpassed, and almost entirely supplanted, by the Spad of 140, 180, 200, and 230 horse-power, and we have transferred our allegiance to each in turn, marveling at the restless genius of the French in motor- and aircraft-construction.

At last we were ready for acrobacy. I will not give a detailed account of these trials by means of which one's ability as a combat pilot is most severely tested. This belongs in the pages of a textbook rather than in those of a journal of this kind. But to us, who were to undergo the ordeal, —

for it is an ordeal for the young pilot, — our typewritten notes on acrobacy read like the pages of a fascinating romance. A year or two ago these aerial manœuvres would have been thought impossible. Now we were all to do them as a matter of routine training.

The worst of it was, that our civilian pursuits offered no criterion on which to base forecasts of our ability as acrobats. There was J. B., for example. He knew a mixed metaphor when he saw one, for he had had wide experience with them as an English instructor at a New England prep. school. But he had never done a barrel turn, or anything resembling it. How was he to know what his reaction would be to this bewildering manœuvre, a series of rapid, horizontal, corkscrew turns? And to what use could I put my fading knowledge of Massachusetts statutes, dealing with neglect and non-support of family, in that exciting moment when, for the first time, I should be whirling earthward in a spinning nose-dive? Accidents and fatalities were most frequent at the school of acrobacy for the reason that one could not know, beforehand, whether he would be able to keep his head, and do the right thing at the right moment, with the earth gone mad, spinning like a top, standing on one rim, turning upside down.

In the end we all mastered it after a fashion, for the tests are by no means so difficult of accomplishment as they appear to be. Up to this time, November 28, 1917, there has been but one American killed at it in French schools. We were not all good acrobats. One must have a knack for it which many of us will never be able to acquire. The French have it in larger proportion than do we Americans. I can think of no sight more pleasing than that of a Spad in the air, under the control of a skillful French pilot. Swallows perch in envious silence on the

chimney-pots, and the crows caw in sullen despair from the hedgerows.

At G.D.E., while awaiting our call to the front, we perfected ourselves in these manœuvres, and practiced them in combat and group flying. There, the restraints of the schools were removed, for we were supposed to be accomplished pilots. We flew when, and in what manner, we liked. Sometimes we went out in large formations, for a long flight; sometimes, in groups of two or three, we made sham attacks on villages, or trains, or motor-convoys on the roads.

It was forbidden to fly over Paris, and for this reason we took all the more delight in doing it. J. B. and I saw it in all its moods: in the haze of early morning, at midday when the air had been washed clean by spring rain, in the soft light of afternoon — domes, theatres, temples, spires, streets, parks, the river, bridges, all of it spread out in a magnificent panorama. We would circle over Montmartre, Neuilly, the Bois, St. Cloud, the Latin Quarter, and then full speed homeward, listening anxiously to the sound of our motors until we spiraled safely down over our aerodrome. Our monitor would smile knowingly when he looked at the essence-gauge, but he never asked questions. He is one of many Frenchmen whom we shall always remember with gratitude.

We learned the songs of all motors, the peculiarities and uses of all types of French *avions*, pushers and tractors, single motor and bi-motor, monoplace, biplace and triplace, monoplane and biplane. And we mingled with the pilots of all these many kinds of aircraft. They were arriving and departing by every train, for G.D.E. is the *dépôt* for old pilots from the front, transferring from one branch of aviation to another, as well as for new ones fresh from the schools. In our talks with them, we

became convinced that the air-service is forming its traditions and developing a new type of mind. It even has an odor, as peculiar to itself as the smell of the sea to a ship. There are those who say that it is only a compound of burnt castor oil and gasoline. One might, with no more truth, call the odor of a ship a mixture of tar and stale cooking. But let it pass. It will be all things to all men, I am conscious of it as I write, for it gets into one's clothing, one's hair, one's very blood; but if I should attempt to analyze it, to say what it is to me, some of my fellow aviators would be sure to say, 'Nobody home.'

We were as happy during those days at G.D.E. as any one has the right to be. Our whole duty was to fly, and never was the voice of Duty heard more gladly. It was hard to keep in mind the stern purpose behind this seeming indulgence. At times I remembered Drew's warning that we were military pilots and had no right to forget the seriousness of the work before us. But he himself often forgot it for days together. War on the earth may be reasonable and natural, but in the air, it seems the most senseless folly. How is an airman, who has just learned a new meaning for the joy of life, to reconcile himself to the insane

business of killing a fellow aviator who has just learned it, too? This was a question which we sometimes put to ourselves in purely Arcadian moments. But I would not have it believed that we did not answer it, or that we were two silly sentimentalists who either lived or cared to live in a fool's paradise. We would have been shamed into answering it as we ought, from a feeling of obligation if for no weightier reason. Our training represented a costly investment on the part of a government which was fighting for its existence. We knew that returns were expected from it, and were never so glad as on the day when we were asked to begin payments.

I was sitting at our two-legged table, writing up my *carte de vol*. Suzanne, the maid-of-all-work at the Bonne Rencontre, was sweeping a passageway along the centre of the room, telling me, as she worked, about her family. She was ticking off on her fingers, the names of her brothers and sisters, when Drew put his head through the doorway.

'Il y a Pierre,' said Suzanne.

'We're posted!' said J. B.

'Et Hélène,' she continued.

I shall never know the names of the others.

(To be continued)

A MAYOR IN ALSACE

BY DANIEL BLUMENTHAL

I

THE question of Alsace-Lorraine cannot be thrust aside at the time of the general settlement of accounts to which the future peace congress will have to give its attention.

The war did not break out over Alsace-Lorraine, but nothing is more certain than that the brutal treatment of which France was the victim, at Germany's hands, in 1871, had had its influence on the policy of the whole world in the matter of armaments. All the nations said to themselves that what had happened to France might well be their own fate to-morrow, if they neglected to take the precautionary defensive measures, that were demanded against an empire which, as Germany did, aspired to the hegemony of the world, and of which war had been, from time immemorial, the national industry.

The only claim of right — and that was nullified by being founded on violence — on which Germany has relied, down to the present time, to justify her occupation of Alsace-Lorraine, depends upon the treaty of Frankfort (1871). As Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg in the first days of August, 1914, tore up this document, together with divers other 'scraps of paper,' Alsace-Lorraine should be restored to France without the necessity of any previous retrocession on Germany's part.

The restoration of those provinces to France, unconditionally, is moreover the only solution that will fulfill the un-

changing aspirations of their native population, which forms the vast majority of the present inhabitants — 1,500,000 out of 1,900,000.

The native Alsace-Lorrainers, with very few exceptions, have always given evidence of their immovable attachment to the French fatherland, and of their inextinguishable hatred of Germany. There are two principal reasons for this: the community of ideas and feelings with France, and Germany's inability to stamp out that frame of mind and to assimilate the population to *Deutschthum*, to germanize it by means of the procedure suggested by the famous *Kultur*.

We must remember that the Alsacians and Lorrainers have always been extremely independent in character, permeated with principles of justice and equality; and that they saw in the establishment and consolidation of the Third Republic the means of realizing their democratic longings.

It was at that moment that they were torn from their fatherland, to be incorporated by force in a detested enemy state, where autocratic government was the essential condition of prosperity in its militaristic policy. And even then they were not to enjoy the rights — albeit closely restricted — of German subjects. They were placed under an exceptional régime: instead of being German citizens, or, at least, German subjects, they became mere objects of domination.

That is why Germany was destined to fail lamentably in all her efforts to