France's Airman-Artist Tells How He Works
Lieutenant Farre, Official Painter of War as Seen from the Air, Has Risked His Life Over Scores of Battles in Full Swing

Toward the moment is a French officer who goes up in airplanes not to navigates but to see photographs or to facilitate the work of the French artillery. For your machine-guns to hit targets and for your troops to advance, you must know exactly where the enemy is. This is the kind of work that this officer goes up to paint pictures. He is a pioneer in a brand-new branch of art, the art of painting from the air, and he has already achieved great success in this strange calling. Lieutenant Henri Farre, 28, whose official title is "Observateur Bombardier au Groupe d'Entierдрille de Bombardement," which sounds picturesque like the name of a flying aviator. But Lieutenant Farre is in reality the official painter appointed by the army to record from the air the fighting of the war.

He doesn't do it by hovering in the air like a sportsman from fields of battle. His task is to climb, squirm, and squeeze through the enemy's fire, to record the every minute blow that comes into his lifetime, to sketch in a sketch the very minute he is back on the living earth of the regiment.

Intent on obtaining material for his pictures, Farre has already been present at, or rather over, more than 100 battles, ranging all the way from skirmishes to full-scale battles that will have a resounding name in history.

Nothing is needed on the ground to give the most graphic description of one that he has been present in to any soldier alive in three years and a half of war. The artist armed with the fingers of his camera tells on the film, in front of him, at intervals of five seconds, how he brought his other feet down with all his strength on the deck. Tat-tat-tat-tat. Bang! Tat-tat-tat-tat. Bang! Try it. You will get an idea of what you have never heard before unless you have heard the real thing.

How do I work my duty," he went on, in answer to a question. "I am, say, somewhere in the rear of the fighting. An attack is begun. I am notified. Up I go with one of our pilots. We approach the field of battle, strike into the midst of it, keep straight over it. I take in every detail. I come back with the topography of the place. I transform my head into a camera. It took me six months to learn how to find it easy, I can tell. I fix my eyes on every feature of the landscape beneath me. My brain becomes a photographic plate.

"Sometimes we hover over the battlefield for as long as half an hour, or more. Other airplanes plunge to the ground. But we escape. Our pilot, whom I have just witnessed, is back to the rear. We land. I have no time to lose. I sit down immediately and sketch from memory. I have thus far drawn and painted 14 pieces also, from what I remember and a system of jotting down numbers for colors while I am in the air. I make a map of the battle I have just witnessed.

"The battle stops. I return to the 1st staff and, with my sketch, verify the position and correct it where correction is necessary.

"How many battles have I studied for this? I can't tell you. The artist made a diary calculation. "Oh, it should very many, more or less. At any rate, I have been in constant service of the air. Of those I have not painted all yet. I have begun for a long time."

"The photographs of many," he said, "I am not the only one."

Lieutenant Farre is very proud of the lettering in his book. He is ocean bottom from the air, me, de Kerfil, writes: "Why do we know?"

French Airman Observing Effects of Artillery Fire on German Positions About Le Mort Homme on the Verdun Front. From a Painting by Lieutenant Farre.

(Continued on Page 14)
France’s Airman-Artist Tells How He Works

(Continued from Page 11)

“To take to them the agonies of suffering and the sorrows of war; to make their sufferings commensurate with ours; to avenge the women and innocent children assassinated by them. To kill, to kill a great deal!”

“To paralyze their industrial life, to put out the fires of the forges in their factories, to strike down the workmen at the anvil, to sow terror in their workshops. To blockade them in the air!—to destroy, to destroy much!”

“To hold their aerial forces, to dominate them by attack, drive them to the defensive, fight and vanquish them over their own soil. To win the mastery of the heavens, of their heavens! To strike, to strike very hard!”

“Why do we bombard?”
“Why do we bombard?”
“So that, in their mutilated cities, they, too, may remember!”

Another of the letters is from Heurteaux, who, says Lieutenant Farré, ranks second only to the late Guyenner among French aces. Still another bears the signature of Partridge, an aviator of Irish extraction, who says:

“As for the sensations experienced in these night flights over the battlefield, lighted up by thousands of rockets and bursting projectiles and the jets of flame from machine guns, you know them, dear Master, for you saw them in those splendor hours at Verdun in 1916, when you took part yourself in the operations. “What a sublime and savage beauty the field of battle has been seen by night! And, when the lines are passed, when you in turn are mixing in the fray, in the midst of the bursting shells, traversing all this in order to approach him who is hurling them, who is already nervously searching for you through the darkness, to destroy him with a volley from your machine gun so that you may accomplish your mission without being blinded—then it is that you feel what cannot be expressed in words! When your goal lies before you, at the exact second when your projectiles are about to be loosed, you realize at one and the same moment the sum total of the dangers which you have escaped to get where you are, the excitement incident to the dropping of the projectiles, and, finally, that feeling of power, of domination, of superiority over the enemy whom you have at your mercy, whom you can destroy or spare with a turn of your hand. And at that moment you think, too, of those who have died and you do your work of destruction with joy!”

Partridge closes with this sentence, full of meaning for us of America: “An immense field is opening for the employment of bombardment from the air. It will bring success. Truly an offensive weapon, it takes the fighting into the enemy’s country. Day and night we carry our colors across the Rhine. It is a sign of the coming victory!”

The New York Times
Published: March 3, 1918
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