

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

IN our midst is a French officer who goes up in airplanes not to navigate them or take photographs to facilitate the work of the French artillery or pour machine-gun bullets into German trenches below. He goes up to paint pictures. He is a pioneer in a brand-new branch of art, the art of painting war pictures from the air, and he has already achieved great success in this strange calling. Lieutenant Henri Farré is his name, and his official title is "Observateur Bombardier au Groupe d'Escadrille de Bombardement," which sounds suspiciously like that of a fighter pilot.

But Lieutenant Farré is in reality the official painter appointed by the French Government to record from the air the fighting of this war. He doesn't do it by hovering in the air miles from fields of battle. His task is to circle squarely over the scene of the fighting, to record minutely in his mind its details oblivious of shells that may any minute blow him into eternity, to jot down these details in a sketch the very minute he is back on terra firma. Intent on obtaining subjects for his art, Lieutenant Farré has already been present at—or, rather over—scores of fights along the long western front, ranging all the way from skirmishes to full-size battles that will have a resounding name in history.

And he has never got a scratch. "I was lucky, that's all," he explains. "Many of the aviators flying near me were killed or wounded."

Lieutenant Farré has brought with him to this country a collection of his battle pictures, which will be exhibited here from March 10 to 20, inclusive. The entire proceeds will go toward the support of the children of French aviators killed in action.

The artist-aviator is modest. He doesn't like to talk about his own adventures. He prefers to describe the exploits of the daring "aces" who are his intimate friends, whose portraits he has made. Among these are our own Thaw and Lufbery. He has compiled a book on French aviation, to which some famous kings of the air have contributed letters telling how they do their daredevil work. "Dear Master" is the way they address Lieutenant Farré, testifying to the reverence for art that is typical of France.

With a reproduction of one of his pictures before him, the soldier-artist describes what it is intended to represent with a clearness that leaves nothing to be desired. He makes his hearer see, taste, and smell battle. It is an airplane flying madly over a flat landscape. Beneath it are little blotches, some small, some like white clouds. It is all very mysterious. But the artist proceeds to unfold what proves, for his hearer, to be an entirely new phase of war work—as it doubtless will to most of the readers of his explanation:

"Have you ever stopped to think of the position of infantry in an attack after they have occupied the trenches of the enemy? Their commanders, sometimes far behind, do not know how far

they have advanced. The artillery, miles in the rear, cannot fire for fear of hitting the French infantry, somewhere out in front. Until the gunners know just where the infantry is, they do not dare let loose their shells.

"That is the time for the aviator whom I show in my picture. Swooping low over the terrain over which the attack has just been made he fires a smoke pistol once, twice, or thrice. It is a signal arranged before the attack. Its meaning is: 'Infantrymen, tell me where you are.'"

"At once from all over the ground be-

guns roar and spit out flame, yet never drop a single shell into the burrows where the poilus of the attack are crouched, waiting further orders."

The Lieutenant takes another photograph from his collection. It is a reproduction of another airplane, this time flying over bursting shells, amid sheets of flame and scattered steel fragments and stones, over a landscape of murkiness and death. And he says calmly:

"That it at the battle which gave us back Le Mort Homme outside Verdun. Here you see an aviator whose duty it is to fly as low as he possibly can over the

Le Mort Homme. This position, honey-combed with trenches, has become an inferno, an utter chaos, on account of the extreme violence of the artillery fire which has been concentrated upon it.

"The airplane in the picture is of the Farman type. I have shown it scarcely three hundred feet from the ground. The aviator is observing attentively the effect of our artillery fire and, by means of his T. S. F.—the artist used the three letters which in France denote wireless telegraph—"is flashing back messages to the artillery.

"Imagine yourself in the place of this airman, flying in the midst of dense smoke and infernal explosions! Have you any idea of what a bombardment sounds like?" The eager Frenchman at once proceeded to give what, to his hearer, was the most graphic description of one that he has heard in all these three years and a half of war. The artist drummed with the fingers of one hand on the desk in front of him; at intervals of a few seconds he brought his other fist down with all his strength on the desk. Tat-tat-tat. Bang! Tat-tat-tat. Bang! Try it. You will get an

idea of a bombardment that you never had before unless you have heard the real thing.

"How do I do my work?" 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, keeping straight over it. I take in every detail. I saturate my brain with the topography of the place. I transform my head into a camera. It took me six months to learn to do that, but now I find it easy. I concentrate. I fix my eyes on every feature of the landscape beneath me. My brain becomes a photographic plate.

"Sometimes we hover over the battle as long as half an hour. Shells burst around us. Other airmen plunge to the ground. But we escape. Then my pilot whirls around and we fly back to the rear. We land. I have no time to lose. I sit down immediately and sketch from memory the scene I have just witnessed. From what I remember and a system of jotting down numbers for colors while I am in the air I make a rough sketch of the battle I have just witnessed.

"The battle stops. I return to the battlefield and, at my leisure, verify the points of my sketch, correct it wherever correction is necessary.

"How many battles have I studied for pictures from the air?" The artist made a hasty calculation. "Oh, I should say eighty, more or less—I have never counted them up exactly. Of these I have not painted all yet." He tapped his forehead.

"The photographs of many," he said, "I still have here."

Lieutenant Farré is very proud of the letters in his book from French "aces." Describing bombardment from the air, one, de Kerillis, wrote:

"Why do we bombard?"



Lieutenant Farre's Painting of an Aviator Ascertaining, from Smoke Puffs Below, How Far the Various Units of French Infantry Have Penetrated in an Attack on German Trenches.

low the airman come little puffs of white smoke. They are sent out by the French infantrymen who have just fought their way into the enemy's trenches and have been crouching there, keeping under cover, lest shells from the positions still held by the enemy search them out and blow them to pieces. The smoke comes from little cans of powder which the soldiers open and touch off with a match. It is a heavy smoke that never rises more than a few feet from the ground, thus remaining practically invisible to the enemy, but it is clearly seen by the airman. He makes a note of every one of the spots from which the little puffs come, and, through his wireless, signals back to the artillery the new positions to which the French infantry has penetrated. Once again the heavy French

enemy's positions in order to find out just what amount of destruction our artillery fire is causing. Aviators doing this work must drop down so near the ground that sometimes fragments of shells that burst on the ground, hurtling through the wings of their machines, hurl them to death on the ground below. And don't forget that this danger is in addition to the ordinary chances of being hit by the direct fire of the enemy to which aviators are always exposed, and to the chance of being asphyxiated in the clouds of smoke and gas that roll over the battlefield. For this work you must have all the coolness which human nature is capable of possessing.

"In this picture I showed as accurately as I could the exact topography around



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

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"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?*

"So as not to be bombarded ourselves.

"*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 Guynemer 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 splen-

did hours at Verdun in 1916, when you took part yourself in the operations.

"What a sublime and savage beauty the field of battle has when 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!"

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