

A Yankee Ace in the RAF

The World War I Letters of Captain Bogart Rogers
Edited by John H. Morrow Jr. and Earl Rogers
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Above the dueling artillery and the raging battles of the front line trenches Captain Bogart Rogers and his fellow pilots fought the world's first air war in the skies over Europe . Suffused with the romance of flight and the harsh realities of aerial combat, Rogers ' letters to his fiancée, Isabelle Young, vividly detail his wartime experiences against a lethal and elusive opponent exemplified by the pilots of Baron von Richthofen's Flying Circus.

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About Bogart Rogers

The son of controversial Los Angeles attorney Earl Rogers ("the greatest jury lawyer of his time," claimed Clarence Darrow) and brother to pioneering Hearst journalist Adela Rogers St. Johns, Bogart made his mark in the Great War. Of the 300 plus Americans who joined the British Royal Flying Corps in 1917, only Rogers and two dozen other volunteers became aces. Assigned to RAF No. 32 Squadron, he arrived in France at the end of April, 1918. From the middle of May to the Armistice on November 11 he flew 140 combat missions in one of the premier fighter planes of the time, the SE-5a.

Excerpt from A Yankee Ace in the RAF

July 18, 1918--Chateau Thierry Offensive

The morning show consisted of a protective patrol for artillery machines doing contact patrol. Our people staged a big push this morning. It will be ancient history by the time you get this, but it was a very successful show according to the latest reports. I led three other fellows up and down a small sector of line, quite low and the two seaters were working below us. There was a good deal of war going on, heavy shelling, tanks in action, and fires everywhere. It was all very interesting to watch, but when you're leading a bunch over a perfectly strange sector and have to keep watching where you are besides watching for Huns and keeping a formation together it's none too easy. There were some Huns out, but they didn't bother us.

This afternoon we did another protective patrol, more machines and at a very bad altitude as we were in a mass of clouds. I was on the tail of the lower bunch, but one chap—one of the two crashers I told you about—wouldn't stay where he belonged, flew wide and very foolishly all the way to the line. We crossed in a bad wind, one which was blowing toward Hunland, and dodged in and out among the clouds. We hadn't any more than crossed when two solitary bursts of archie appeared above and ahead. Right away I started looking for Huns and in about ten seconds twelve of them tumbled out over a big white cloud, and down they came. This one chap straggling out in the rear was cold turkey for them and to make matters worse he flew straight as string, maybe he didn't even see them. But I'm pretty sure they got him.

One Fokker biplane sat right on his tail and pumped smoke tracers into him until he suddenly went up in a big zoom and then dived. I tried to get around to him but immediately three Huns jumped on me and wasted a lot of high explosives. It surely put the wind up me to have three Germans tumble down and when they're above and outnumber you the only thing to do is clear out.