

# GERMANY PREPARING TO MEET AMERICA'S AERIAL OFFENSIVE OF 1918

### The Allies Are Trusting in This Country to Insure Decisive Victory in Terrific Struggle for Aerial Mastery That Will Open in the Spring—Enemy's Plans and Hopes Revealed by Captured Ludendorff Order—Stories of Air Fighting Told by British Airmen

By JOHN L. BALDERSTON  
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London, Nov. 10.—(By mail)—Nineteen Eighteen—the Air Year! Only the men behind the scenes on the air boards are able to foresee what that year will be like, to picture the daily and nightly scenes of terror and splendor all over Europe—the civilians cowering in cellars amid tumult of shattering explosions, the destruction of factories and bridges far behind the battle lines, the disorganization of communications and transport and perhaps the harrying to an unbearable state of the troops that must march along the roads to and from their billets in the war zone. And the men who are planning these things, up to their ears in technical work, are too busy to talk or even think about what is going to happen.

The detection of Russia, the disasters to Italy, have made clear to at least one American in what high confidence and respect his country is held in England and France. "At the worst we will see it through together," he is told on every hand. It makes him proud to be an American, but also a little afraid; afraid that the United States, with the best will in the world, will be unable to measure up to these tremendous expectations. In land warfare, the mass of people, here undoubtedly expect too much, more than is humanly possible, of our troops in 1918. Nineteen nineteen, if the war lasts so long, will be another story.

**America's Important Part.**  
But it is in the air, next year, that America can and will play an enormous part, a part so splendid, it is to be hoped, that nobody will think of grumbling while the tedious business of transport and training, of learning

in quiet sectors the rudiments of warfare, makes General Pershing's army ready for the great destiny which history reserves for it.

Everything possible is being done here and in France, to prepare for the "air drive." That was made clear to me in a long conversation recently with General Sir David Henderson, director of military aeronautics, the head of Britain's air service. But these things cannot be discussed. What all the authorities here are anxious to bring home to the American people is that Germany is working, too, and that therefore it is to America that the allies must look to furnish that great superiority, next year, that will make of the air service a deciding weapon in the grim struggle against autocracy. To make this clear, it is permissible to give here some facts concerning these German preparations.

**Germans Preparing.**  
The Germans, masters of war as they are, were quick to realize the meaning of the great American air program. They were instant to take steps to meet it. During the winter, the German air authorities have been able to assure the All Highest General Staff, the number of battleplanes will be doubled, in addition to the normal production to meet the heavy wastage. During the later summer and early autumn, all German aeroplane and automobile factories commenced enlarging their plants to permit the carrying out of the new building orders.

Twenty-nine factories of great size, hitherto engaged on other war work or on civilian manufacturing, were taken over for aeroplane construction during last spring and summer. Among these is the great Berzina piano factory in Schwerin, now occupied by the Volkler firm, where fighting bi-planes are being turned out, in

addition to a new tri-plane whose great speed and ability to climb quickly render it a most formidable opponent. The greatest concentration appears to be on long distance bombing machines, an exciting proof of the German view of the course that air warfare will take next year. The new Rumpler model, with 240 horse-power Mercedes motors, is the best of these. The machine carries three men and weighs 1,700 and 1,800 pounds of bombs, and, when fully loaded, can climb 12,000 feet in 35 minutes. The six-cylinder Maybach motor, lighter than the Mercedes and giving greater climbing power in less time, is also a favorite in the new construction. Electrical installations, driven by a small motor which derives its power from the revolutions of the propeller, warm the airmen, who also carry oxygen respirators to enable them to breathe at enormous altitudes. An all-metal machine, difficult to set on fire, designed to fly low and co-operate with advancing, or it is to be hoped, retreating troops, will soon be ready to take the air in considerable numbers.

Nor are the Germans letting grass grow under their feet in providing pilots for their new squadrons. Formerly, only cavalrymen were allotted to volunteer for the air service. Now, applicants from all arms of the war machine are received. An order from General Ludendorff, captured during a recent offensive, probably addressed to all superior officers in the German army, shows how the man who is called "the brains of Hindenburg" plans to husband his resources to meet the allied drive in 1918. The order says that the allies are employing their aeroplanes economically, with a view to the great battles of the future, and adds:

"We should be wrong to overwork and wear out our squadrons which are inferior in numbers, by sending them out several times each day. Consequently, the infantry and artillery must be told that it is impossible to prevent the enemy planes from flying over our lines, and they must not get nervous when they see them overhead. Airmen are to be used sparingly in calm times, in order that Germany may have as many of them as possible for great emergencies."

**New German Program.**  
The meaning of the new German program is that it is up to America to furnish, and in time, men and machines enough to make the "air drive" disastrous for Germany. If this were not done, the utmost efforts of the other allied powers in the air, great as those efforts are, might not succeed in overcoming the German air service sufficiently next year appreciably to change the course of the war.

From the airmen themselves, I have gathered some narratives to indicate phases of modern warfare in the sky—the story of a typical bombing raid, a thrilling account of the capture and abduction of a German pilot, in a fight continued on the ground after having begun in the air. These are given below.

But the principal and most important work of the aeroplanes is not bombing or bombing, but observation. As everybody knows, they are the "eyes of the guns." Major C. J. Street, an artillery officer in the British army, who has also flown, has supplied me with a vivid picture of what "spotting" is really like. "The hostile battery," he said, "may be hidden behind a crest or a belt of trees, so as to be invisible from any point within our own lines. But its presence is soon detected, and in a very short time."

The aeroplane maneuvers for a position from which the observer can get a clear view of the target, which is as secure as possible from the anti-aircraft guns that surround him with bursting shells whenever he comes within their range. Having found a favorable bent, he warns the battery that he is ready, and the fun begins. There are trees all around the target, which might hide the burst of the shell from him at first, but the battery commander knows all about this, he has a photograph of the place before him, and he sends a first shot straight into the open country. A cloud of brown earth and a puff of black smoke reveals the bursting shell.

The observer signals to the battery the point where it fell, and turns to wait the next round, which in a few seconds falls on the other side of the target. This too is signalled to the battery, and the process continues until the battery commander is satisfied with the results. No gun in the world will drop every round in the same place, the art of spotting is to find the gun elevation that will ensure the greatest possible proportion of shells falling on the target. Having found this elevation to his own satisfaction, the battery commander informs the observer of the fact, and proceeds to carry on.

**Work of the Observer.**  
The observer flies comfortably up and down his bent, signalling a sort of running commentary of the shooting. Guns once set on a target are not likely to get off it again, if conditions remain the same, but sometimes these alter and the stream of shell drifts slightly wide. The observer notifies this, and the battery corrects accordingly. The former can see everything so distinctly—the country spread out beneath him like a map, the belt of trees that hides the guns, now so torn and shattered that one of the gun-pits lies plainly open to view. The shells fall regularly around the unlucky battery, sending up brown spurts of earth when they strike the open fields, sometimes hitting one of the trees, when a black wreath of smoke with a heart of fire bursts out, clearing to show a great gash in the green verdure. Now and again a round falls a right into one of the pits, shapeless lumps of timber and concrete rise far above the pall of smoke, a jagged edge may be seen where a few seconds ago a straight line revealed the edge of the cover.

"A shell bursts beneath the trees, the observer misses it for an instant until wisps of smoke, ascending through the branches, shows him where it fell, fifty yards or so from the guns. It was an abnormal round, such as sometimes occurs, hardly worth worrying the battery about.

But ten seconds after it falls, a vivid flash shoots up from the place, followed by a rolling cloud of grey smoke that spreads until it hides the whole position. That stray round must have fallen into an ammunition store, setting fire to it and its contents. The cartridges are burning now; perhaps, with any luck, the fire will spread to the shell stacked nearby. The whole countryside is obscured, making observation impossible for the time. The observer signals the battery to wait, and circles round to keep an eye on events. Suddenly the smoke is rent by a gust of flame, the aeroplane rocks with a violent concussion, needing all the observer's attention for a moment. When he has leisure to look again, a patch of trees has disappeared, revealing a jagged crater from which black smoke still rises slowly. The enemy's shells have exploded, adding to the chaos already produced in his battery.

The explosion has blown the smoke away, and all is clear again; the observer signals the battery to go on. The shells fall regularly once more, continuing until the battery commander considers that further firing will be waste of ammunition. Then the aeroplane, after one last circle round the shattered position to survey the amount of damage done, sets off towards its distant aerodrome, while the battery cleans its guns and prepares for the next shoot upon its program."

**Feat of One Airman.**  
The modesty of the air service prevents the use of the name of the British airman who performed the feat of capturing a Boche airman on the ground and carrying him into captivity. Lieutenant Roland Jones is the narrator of the story. Here it is:

"One of our little 'wasps,' (a particularly fast one at that) was riding high in the heavens. He was very high up, so high, indeed, as to have been undetected by the enemy as he swept over the lines at a speed exceeding one hundred miles an hour. He was alone in the deep blue sky, while French and British and some German machines passed and repassed far below him.

"He had flown over the lines, and down there on the earth he could see country in which there were no signs of troops. The first symptom of his detection by the enemy was a tiny black aeroplane several thousand feet below; some seconds with its innumerable occupant. He dived to ground followed by the English. In landing he crashed and his machine turned turtle. Shaken but unhurt, he climbed out, regained his machine and opened fire at his opponent, who was circling round about. The latter dived, flattened out and landed in the next field far from any house or visible sign of life.

"Thereupon ensued a battle royal. Both piled their machine guns for all they were worth. The English gun was the first to jam; the pilot has perforce to play 'possum,' revolver in hand. In such a situation some one has to make the first move. Unfortunately for the Hun, he, in his endeavor to ascertain the meaning of this sudden silence, advanced unawares, and found himself pulled up at revolver point.

"Good morning," said his opponent. "Good morning," replied the Hun. "Just jump into my machine," murmured the Englishman, "and mind, no tricks!"

"An invitation like this cannot be refused, especially when it is given three feet away from behind a convincing looking 'automatic' of the very latest type. The Hun, without remonstrance, climbed into the engine seat, the self-starter was put into action, and captor and captive rose from the ground, leaving the wrecked plane to be puzzled over by the Germans.

"Back in the English aerodrome once more.

"Thank you," said the Hun. "That's all right! You may be better than some of your crowd!"

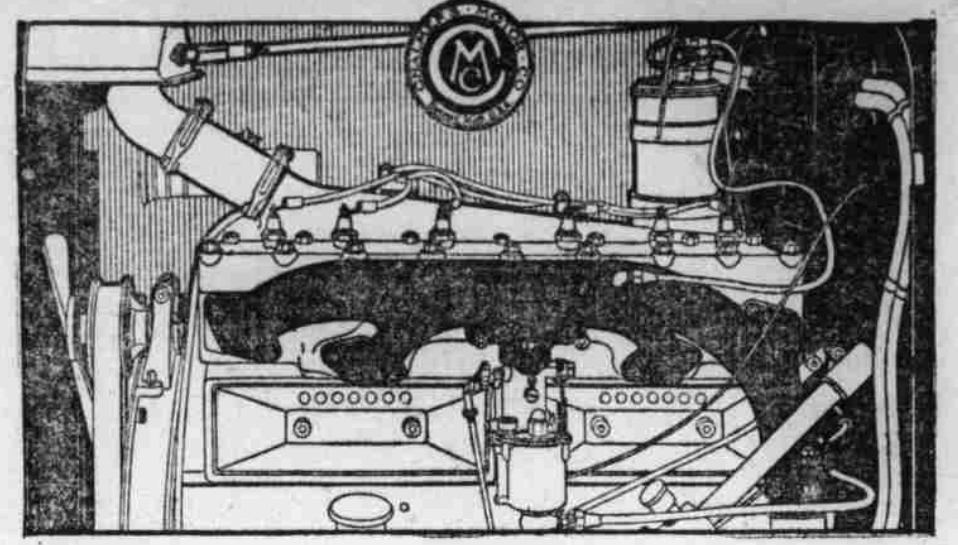
"To those who know only the German army on the ground, some Hun-soldiers seem surprisingly good fellows and such is the etiquette of war."

**Bombing Raid.**  
"It is 5 o'clock in the morning," he begins. The engines are started, and warmed, and the pilots cover their eyes with goggles. They then have a few moments in which to smoke until the C. O. appears. A buzz on the telephone is heard; the engines are restarted, and, at a signal from the commander, they "taxi" out on to the aerodrome preparatory to taking off, and the bombing raid has begun. "There are ten machines in all, four of them acting as escort to ward off the attacks of hostile aircraft while the bombing is in progress.

The aeroplanes leave the ground in a long stream, the leader having a triangular flag attached to his tail planes or wings. Quickly getting into their required positions, they circle around the aerodrome until they receive a signal from the ground, giving them permission to make for the lines. "Climbing steadily all the time they follow their leaders Hunwards, and cross the lines at varying heights, from ten thousand to eight thousand feet, spreading out to avoid the chances of being hit by 'Archies' (anti-aircraft guns).

"They hope to avoid detection, but immediately they are within range they hear 'crump, crump, crump' and the 'Archies' is letting them have it hot. Three greenish brown puffs of smoke are to be seen above them; again 'crump, crump,' and this time below. For the next few minutes shells burst all around them, and then the fire suddenly stops. No doubt the Germans are mounting their guns on lorries and taking them further back, in order to get another shot at them.

"At last their objective heaves in sight; the bomb sights are set, and the pilots get ready to drop the bombs. As each machine passes over the tar-



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get the pilot releases his bombs, banks steeply round, and makes for home. His day's work seems finished. He is just beginning to think what an easy time he has had, when "crump, crump, crump" and the 'Archies' is letting him have it again. Unhindered by his bombs, he swerves to the right and left, climbing and diving alternately to lessen the chances of being hit. Suddenly the firing stops, and the lines are in sight.

"His troubles, however, are not over. 'Pop, pop, pop, pop' he hears. He looks around to see who is firing, and they swerve away exposing at the same time the whole of their machines to fire.

"The bomber, firing hard, follows them as they dive to earth but gives up the chase after a few thousand feet. As he crosses the lines he is once more fitted with a hail of exploding shells, but he reaches his aerodrome in safety, and lands.

"Beastly cold? wasn't it in his only remark as he goes down to the mess for the meal he is ready to enjoy. The airman gets his fighting in very concentrated doses."

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