

# "OUTWITTING THE HUN"

By Lieutenant Pat O'Brien

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## O'BRIEN FINDS HIMSELF A PRISONER OF WAR AFTER A MIRACULOUS ESCAPE FROM DEATH.

**Synopsis.**—Pat O'Brien, a resident of Mokenca, Ill., after seeing service in the American flying corps on the Mexican border in 1916, joins the British Royal Flying Corps in Canada, and after a brief training period is sent to France. He is assigned to a squadron in active service on the front. He engages in several hot fights with German flyers, from which he emerges victorious.

### CHAPTER III.

#### Captured by the Huns.

I shall not easily forget the 17th of August, 1917. I killed two Huns in the double-seater machine in the morning, another in the evening, and then I was captured myself. I may have spent more eventful days in my life, but I can't recall any just now.

That morning, in crossing the line on early morning patrol, I noticed two German balloons. I decided that as soon as my patrol was over I would go off on my own hook and see what a German balloon looked like at close quarters.

These observation balloons are used by both sides in conjunction with the artillery. A man sits up in the balloon with a wireless apparatus and directs the firing of the guns. From his point of vantage he can follow the work of his own artillery with a remarkable degree of accuracy and at the same time he can observe the enemy's movements and report them.

The Germans are very good at this work, and they use a great number of



Machine O'Brien Was Driving When He Was Overcome and Captured by the Huns.

these balloons. It was considered a very important part of our work to keep them out of the sky.

There are two ways of going after a balloon in a machine. One of them is to cross the lines at a low altitude, flying so near the ground that the man with the antiaircraft gun can't bother you. You fly along until you get to the level of the balloon and if, in the meantime, they have not drawn the balloon down, you open fire on it and the bullets you use will set it on fire if they land.

The other way is to fly over where you know the balloons to be, put your machine in a spin so that they can't hit you, get above them, spin over the balloon and then open fire. In going back over the line you cross at a few hundred feet.

This is one of the hardest jobs in the service. There is less danger in attacking an enemy's aircraft.

Nevertheless, I had made up my mind to either get those balloons or make them descend, and I only hoped that they would stay on the job until I had a chance at them.

When our two hours' duty was up, therefore, I dropped out of the formation as we crossed the lines and turned back again.

I was at a height of 15,000 feet, considerably higher than the balloons. Shutting my motor off, I dropped down through the clouds, thinking to find the balloons at about five or six miles behind the German lines.

Just as I came out of the cloud banks I saw below me, about a thousand feet, a two-seater hostile machine doing artillery observation and directing the German guns. This was at a point about four miles behind the German lines.

Evidently the German artillery saw me and put out ground signals to attract the Hun machine's attention, for I saw the observer quit his work and grab his gun, while their pilot stuck the nose of his machine straight down.

But they were too late to escape me. I was diving toward them at a speed of probably two hundred miles an hour, shooting all the time as fast as possible. Their only chance lay in the possibility that the force of my dive might break my wings. I knew my danger in that direction, but as soon as I came out of my dive the Huns would have their chance to get me, and I knew I had to get them first and take a chance on my wings holding out.

Fortunately some of my first bullets found their mark, and I was able to come out of my dive at about four thousand feet. They never came out of theirs!

But right then came the hottest sit-

uation in the air I had ever experienced up to that time. The depth of my dive had brought me within reach of the machine guns from the ground, and they also put a barrage around me of shrapnel from antiaircraft guns and I had an opportunity to "ride the barrage," as they call it in the R. F. C. To make the situation more interesting, they began shooting "flaming onions" at me. "Flaming onions" are rockets shot from a rocket gun. They are used to hit a machine when it is flying low, and they are effective up to about five thousand feet. Sometimes they are shot up one after another in strings of about eight, and they are one of the hardest things to go through. If they hit the machine, it is bound to catch fire and then the jig is up.

All the time, too, I was being attacked by "Archie"—the antiaircraft gun. I escaped the machine guns and the "flaming onions," but "Archie," the antiaircraft fire, got me four or five times. Every time a bullet plugged me, or rather my machine, it made a loud bang, on account of the tension on the material covering the wings.

None of their shots hurt me until I was about a mile from our lines, and then they hit my motor. Fortunately, I still had altitude enough to drift on to our own side of the lines, for my motor was completely out of commission. They just raised the dickens with me all the time I was descending, and I began to think I would strike the ground before crossing the line, but there was a slight wind in my favor, and it carried me two miles behind our lines. There the balloons I had gone out to get had the satisfaction of "pin-pointing" me. Through the directions which they were able to give to their artillery they commenced shelling my machine where it lay.

This particular work is to direct the fire of their artillery, and they are used just as the artillery observation airplanes are. Usually two men are stationed in each balloon. They ascend to a height of several thousand feet about five miles behind their own lines and are equipped with wireless and signaling apparatus. They watch the burst of their own artillery, check up the position, get the range, and direct the next shot.

When conditions are favorable they are able to direct the shots so accurately that it is quick work destroying the object of their attack. It was such a balloon as this that got my position, marked me out, called for an artillery shot, and they commenced shelling my machine where it lay. If I had got the two balloons instead of the airplanes, I probably would not have lost my machine, for he would in all probability have gone on home and not bothered about getting my range and causing the destruction of my machine.

I landed in a part of the country that was literally covered with shell holes. Fortunately my machine was not badly damaged by the forced landing. I leisurely got out, walked around it to see what the damage was, and concluded that it could be easily repaired. In fact, I thought if I could find a space long enough between shell holes to get a start before leaving the ground that I would be able to fly on from there.

I was still examining my plane and considering the matter of a few slight repairs, without any particular thought for my own safety in that unprotected spot, when a shell came whizzing through the air, knocked me to the ground and landed a few feet away. It had no sooner struck than I made a run for cover and crawled into a shell hole. I would have liked to get farther away, but I didn't know where the next shell would burst, and I thought I was fairly safe there, so I squatted down and let them blaze away.

The only damage I suffered was from the mud which splattered up in my face and over my clothes. That was my introduction to a shell hole, and I resolved right there that the infantry could have all the shell-hole fighting they wanted, but it did not appeal to me, though they live in them through many a long night and I had only sought shelter there for a few minutes.

After the Germans had completely demolished my machine and ceased firing, I waited there a short time, fearing perhaps they might send over a lucky shot, hoping to get me after all. But evidently they concluded enough shells had been wasted on one man. I crawled out cautiously, shook the mud off, and I looked over in the direction where my machine had once been. There wasn't enough left for a decent souvenir, but nevertheless I got

a few, "such as they were," and readily observing that nothing could be done with what was left, I made my way back to infantry headquarters, where I was able to telephone in a report.

A little later one of our automobiles came out after me and took me back to our airfield. Most of my squadron thought I was lost beyond doubt, and never expected to see me again; but my friend, Paul Raney, had held out that I was all right, and as I was afterwards told, said, "Don't send for another pilot; that Irishman will be back, if he has to walk." And he knew that the only thing that kept me from walking was the fact that our own automobile had been sent out to bring me home.

I had lots to think about that day, and I had learned many things; one was not to have too much confidence in my own ability. One of the men in the squadron told me that I had better not take those chances; that it was going to be a long war and I would have plenty of opportunities to be killed without deliberately "wishing them on" myself. Later I was to learn the truth of his statement.

That night my "flight"—each squadron is divided into three flights, consisting of six men each—got ready to go out again. As I started to put on my tunic I noticed that I was not marked up for duty as usual.

I asked the commanding officer, a major, what the reason for that was, and he replied that he thought I had done enough for one day. However, I knew that if I did not go, someone else from another "flight" would have to take my place, and I insisted upon going up with my patrol as usual, and the major reluctantly consented. Had he known what was in store for me, I am sure he wouldn't have changed his mind so readily.

As it was we had only five machines for this patrol, anyway, because as we crossed the lines one of them had to drop out on account of motor trouble. Our patrol was up at 8 p. m., and up to within ten minutes of that hour it had been entirely uneventful.

At 7:50 p. m., however, while we were flying at a height of 13,000 feet, we observed three other English machines which were about 3,000 feet below us pick a fight with nine Hun machines.

I knew right then that we were in for it, because I could see over toward the ocean a whole flock of Hun machines which evidently had escaped the attention of our scrappy countrymen below us.

So we dove down on those nine Huns.

At first the fight was fairly even. There were eight of us to nine of them. But soon the other machines which I had seen in the distance, and which were flying even higher than we were, arrived on the scene, and when they, in turn, dove down on us, there was just twenty of them to our eight!

Four of them singled me out. I was diving, and they dived right down after me, shooting as they came. Their tracer bullets were coming closer to me every moment. These tracer bullets are balls of fire which enable the shooter to follow the course his bullets are taking and to correct his aim accordingly. They do no more harm to a pilot if he is hit than an ordinary bullet, but if they hit the petrol tank, good night! When a machine catches fire in flight there is no way of put-

ting it out. It takes less than a minute for the fabric to burn off the wings and then the machine drops like an arrow, leaving a trail of smoke like a comet.

As their tracer bullets came closer and closer to me I realized that my chances of escape were nil. Their very next shot, I felt, must hit me.

Once, some days before, when I was flying over the line, I had watched a fight above me. A German machine was set on fire, and dived down through our formation in flames on its way to the ground. The Hun was diving at such a sharp angle that both his wings came off, and as he passed within a few hundred feet of me I saw the look of horror on his face.

Now, when I expected any moment to suffer a similar fate, I could not help thinking of that poor Hun's last look of agony.

I realized that my only chance lay in making an Immelman turn. This maneuver was invented by a German—one of the greatest who ever flew and who was killed in action some time before. This turn, which I made successfully, brought one of their machines right in front of me, and as he sailed along barely ten yards away, I "had the drop" on him, and he knew it.

His white face and startled eyes I can still see. He knew beyond question that his last moment had come, because his position prevented his taking aim at me, while my gun pointed straight at him. My first tracer bullet passed within a yard of his head, the second looked as if it hit his shoulder, the third struck him in the neck, and then I let him have the whole works, and he went down in a spinning nose dive.

All this time the three other Hun machines were shooting away at me. I could hear the bullets striking my machine one after another. I hadn't the slightest idea that I could ever beat off those three Huns, but there was nothing for me to do but fight, and my hands were full.

In fighting, your machine is dropping, dropping all the time. I glanced at my instruments, and my altitude was between 8,000 and 9,000 feet. While I was still looking at the instruments, the whole blamed works disappeared. A burst of bullets went into the instrument board and blew it to smithereens, another bullet went through my upper lip, came out of the roof of my mouth and lodged in my throat, and the next thing I knew was when I came to in a German hospital the following morning at five o'clock, German time.

I was a prisoner of war.

### CHAPTER IV.

#### Clipped Wings.

The hospital in which I found myself on the morning after my capture was a private house made of brick, very low and dirty, and not at all adapted for use as a hospital. It had evidently been used but a few days on account of the big push that was taking place at that time of the year, and in all probability would be abandoned as soon as they had found a better place.

In all, the house contained four rooms and a stable, which was by far the largest of all. Although I never looked into this "wing" of the hospital, I was told that it, too, was filled with patients lying on beds of straw around on the ground. I do not know whether

they, too, were officers or privates.

The room in which I found myself contained eight beds, three of which were occupied by wounded German officers. The other rooms, I imagined, had about the same number of beds as mine. There were no Red Cross nurses in attendance, just orderlies, for this was only an emergency hospital and too near the firing line for nurses. The orderlies were not old men nor very young boys, as I had expected to find, but young men in the prime of life, who evidently had been medical students. One or two of them, I discovered, were able to talk English, but for some reason they would not talk. Perhaps they were forbidden by the officer in charge to do so.

In addition to the bullet wound in my mouth I had a swelling from my forehead to the back of my head almost as big as my shoe—and that is saying considerable. I couldn't move an inch without suffering intense pain, and when the doctor told me that I had no bones broken I wondered how a fellow would feel who had.

German officers visited me that morning and told me that my machine went down in a spinning nose dive from a height of between 8,000 and 9,000 feet, and they had the surprise of their lives when they discovered that I had not been dashed to pieces. They had to cut me out of my machine, which was riddled with shots and shattered to bits.

A German doctor removed the bullet from my throat, and the first thing he said to me when I came to was, "You are an American!"

There was no denying it, because the metal identification disk on my wrist bore the inscription:

"P. O. B.  
U. S. A.  
R. F. C."

Although I was suffering intense agony, the doctor, who spoke perfect English, insisted upon conversing with me.

"You may be all right as a sportsman," he declared, "but you are a d—d murderer just the same for being here. You Americans who got into this thing before America came into the war are no better than common murderers and you ought to be treated the same way!"

The wound in my mouth made it impossible for me to answer him, and I was suffering too much pain to be hurt very much by anything he could say.

He asked me if I would like an apple! I could just as easily have eaten a brick.

When he got no answers out of me, he walked away disgustedly. "You don't have to worry any more," he declared, as a parting shot. "For you the war is over."

I was given a little broth later in the day, and as I began to collect my thoughts I wondered what had happened to my comrades in the battle which had resulted so disastrously to me. As I began to realize my plight I worried less about my physical condition than the fact that, as the doctor had pointed out, for me the war was practically over. I had been in it but a short time, and now I would be a prisoner for the duration of the war!

The next day some German flying officers visited me, and I must say they treated me with great consideration. They told me of the man I had brought down. They said he was a Bavarian and a fairly good pilot. They gave me his hat as a souvenir and complimented me on the fight I had put up.

My helmet, which was of soft leather, was split from front to back by a bullet from a machine gun, and they examined it with great interest. When they brought me my uniform I found that the star of my rank which had been on my right shoulder strap had been shot off clean. The one on my left shoulder strap they asked me for as a souvenir, as also my R. F. C. badges, which I gave them. They allowed me to keep my "wings," which I wore on my left breast, because they were aware that that is the proudest possession of a British flying officer.

I think I am right in saying that the only chivalry in this war on the German side of the trenches has been displayed by the officers of the German flying corps, which comprises the pick of Germany. They pointed out to me that I and my comrades were fighting purely for the love of it, whereas they were fighting in defense of their country, but still, they said, they admired us for our sportsmanship. I had a notion to ask them if dropping bombs on London and killing so many innocent people was in defense of their country, but I was in no position or condition to pick a quarrel at that time.

That same day a German officer was brought into the hospital and put in the bunk next to mine. Of course I casually looked at him, but did not pay particular attention to him at that time. He lay there for three or four hours before I did take a real good look at him. I was positive that he could not speak English, and naturally I did not say anything to him. Once when I looked over in his direction his eyes were on me, and to my surprise he said, very sarcastically, "What the hell are you looking at?" and then

smiled. At this time I was just beginning to say a few words, as my wound had prevented me from talking, but I said enough to let him know what I was doing there and how I happened to be there. He evidently had heard my story from some of the others, though, because he said it was too bad I had not broken my neck; that he did not have much sympathy with the flying corps anyway. He asked me what part of America I came from, and I told him "California." After a few more questions he learned that I hailed from San Francisco, and then added to my distress by saying, "How would you like to have a good, juicy steak right out of the Hofbrau?" Naturally I told him it would "hit the spot," but I hardly thought my mouth was in shape just then to eat it. I immediately asked, of course, what he knew about the Hofbrau, and he replied, "I was connected with the place a good many years, and I ought to know all about it."

After that this German officer and I became rather chummy; that is, as far as I could be chummy with an enemy, and we whiled away a good many long hours talking about the days we had spent in San Francisco, and frequently in the conversation one of us would mention some prominent Californian, or some little incident occurring there, with which we were both familiar.

He told me when war was declared he was, of course, intensely patriotic and thought the only thing for him to do was to go back and aid in the defense of his country. He found that he could not go directly from San Francisco, because the water was too well guarded by the English, so he boarded a boat for South America. There he obtained a forged passport and in the guise of a Montevidean took passage for New York and from there to England.

He passed through England without any difficulty on his forged passport, but concluded not to risk going to Holland for fear of exciting too much suspicion, so went down through the Strait of Gibraltar to Italy, which was neutral at that time, up to Austria,



Pat O'Brien and Paul Raney.

and thence to Germany. He said when they put him in at Gibraltar, after leaving England, there were two suspects taken off the ship, men that he was sure were neutral subjects, but much to his relief his own passport and credentials were examined and passed O. K.

The Hun spoke of his voyage from America to England as being exceptionally pleasant, and said he had a fine time, because he associated with the English passengers on board, his fluent English readily admitting him to several spirited arguments on the subject of the war, which he keenly enjoyed. One little incident he related revealed the remarkable tact which our enemy displayed in his associations at sea, which no doubt resulted advantageously for him. As he expressed it, he "made a hit" one evening when the crowd has assembled for a little music by suggesting that they sing "God Save the King." Thereafter his popularity was assured and the desired effect accomplished, for very soon a French officer came up to him and said, "It's too bad that England and ourselves haven't men in our army like you." It was too bad, he agreed, in telling me about it, because he was confident he could have done a whole lot more for Germany if he had been in the English army. In spite of his apparent loyalty, however, the man didn't seem very enthusiastic over the war and frankly admitted one day that the old political battles waged in California were much more to his liking than the battles he had gone through over here. On second thought he laughed as though it were a good joke, but he evidently intended me to infer that he had taken a keen interest in politics in San Francisco.

From his prison, O'Brien witnesses a thrilling air battle, which results in the death of his chum, who is shot down by a German flyer. Don't miss the next instalment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

**Wives Evidently His Hobby.**  
Probably the modern world's marrying record for men was created by George Witzoff, the bigamist, whose marriages have variously been estimated at from 200 to 300. It was reported that in the space of a single week he went through marriage ceremonies with ten women.

**Worse'n Boils, Too.**  
Old Job had his troubles, but nobody raised the price of ice on him when he was laying in his winter's stock.—At lenta Constitution.



Lieutenant O'Brien in the First Machine He Used in Active Service. With Him Is Lieutenant Atkinson.