



# FLYING ODDS

by **ANDREW A. GAFFREY**

*Lieutenant Wood's engine was hot, but the Huns who tried to force that crate-busting fool out of the sky found that Lieutenant Wood was "hot stuff" too.*

**H**OT MOTOR!" Lieutenant Wood figured. "Here's where my own equipment drives me down! Not so good! Quite rotten, in fact."

Wood's flight was cruising at 16,000 feet. It was in hostile country. Also, the flight was going deeper and deeper into Germany when the outa-luck pilot decided that enough was enough.

Wood humped his Spad's line of fligjit. He zig-zagged the small ship's course. All this as a signal to his wingmates. Quickly those mates "picked up" the disturbance. They looked at Wood. The flight leader

did too. Wood grabbed his nose and pointed at his engine. The nose-grabbing meant. "She smells hot!" The flight leader sent a wave to Wood. Then Wood dropped out of the flight, flew a wing-over turn, and was gone. He was as mad as the very devil!

He went down and back. He was now alone. All in all, it was a very tough dish for any young and ambitious Yank to eat.

But Wood's power plant sure was hot. His thermometer was far in the red. Its needle indicator was bent against the ultimate stop. It had been in this nasty position for the last five minutes, and it was only

in that length of time and study that Wood had given up. Good pilot, this Wood. All Yank too.

Hot stuff! From the motor's expansion reservoir, in the Spad's upper wing, a ghostly wisp of steam waved back and dripped from the trailing edge of the panel. Wood knew that this meant that his motor's water was being siphoned, that the cooling system was losing all its fluid, and that any time, soon, the whole works could be expected to seize, slow up, then stop dead.

Spads were infamous for this bad habit. Tell you what, the guy who devised the Spad cooling system must have been working for fun—and against the welfare of the pilots who were to fly them. This state of affairs was an every-day happening with Spads.

So Wood was trying to make his motor last till he got home. He nursed the thing. He throttled low. Then, as soon as he began to feel safer—twenty minutes after quitting the formation—he put his ship into a glide. Now he throttled even lower than before, stalled and staggered slower, prayed a little too, perhaps. But he still had a thermometer reading that was in the hellish red. And the expansion blew more and more steam; even whipped that steam down into Wood's face to remind him that he was in bad.

Still and all, Wood hoped. Soon he gave less thought to his engine and began to pick out all possible and likely landing spots ahead. He glided some more. Biggest idea of all: Wood made up his mind that he wouldn't start setting her down till she conked on him. Yes, sir, soldier, he'd ride this wreck as far as she'd float! No ship had bested him yet. Wasn't he alive to show that?

And even should she quit on him, Wood made up his mind that he'd stretch his glide and flatten her out till she staggered. Yep, he was out to beat this detail. But flattening out and stretching a Spad's glide is bad stuff. Very bad! More pilots died trying to outguess a Spad's eccentricities than were killed trying to dodge enemy lead. You had to be good to fight Spads and fight an enemy too. As the automobile gang would say: Ask the man who flew one.

THIS MOTOR-NURSING, glide-stretching Yank, Wood, had no way of knowing just how much water might be left in his cooling system. At that time, a pilot never did have. But Lieutenant Wood did know, after a fashion, how much water he did not have. Any bird would know this after he'd sat there and watched his very life blood blow away in the form of wisping steam through the long tight minutes.

Moreover, there was nothing that Wood could do to right this situation. Maybe, if luck were with him, the siphon might quit. Now and then a siphon did break, but not very often. No, the betting was that this ship would let Wood down, and send him.

Now, where the devil is that front line!

It wasn't always easy to determine just where Allied territory began and Hun country started, or vice versa. During the hurried days of this period, the days of the last Big Push, there was no longer a No-Man's-Land, and Yank and Hun were likely to be found in the same towns. The Yank coming in, of course, and the squarehead going out. And the latter'd be going out toot sweet!

However, indistinct as they were, Wood soon approached the front lines. Two towns that he quickly recognized were now burning on this bit of front. It was the first time that burning homes ever looked good to this Yank. Wood wanted to cheer. No, not because of the French losses, but because the thing began to look like home sweet home to one lone Yank.

Allicourt was one of the burning places. To the right of that, and half a dozen kilometers from the fire, was Sedan. The latter city was still an Allied objective. Beyond Allicourt and Remilly—if Wood could only make the distance—was a chance for a safe landing. But this neck of the woods was chock full of hard soldiering, and anti-aircraft's always-ambitious exponents would soon start throwing things at Wood's limping ship.

Suddenly Archie did open up on him and put a stop to his thoughts. Flaming onions came up to flirt with him. Tracers from machine-gun positions on the high spots marked their paths too close to him. H-E shells shrieked above the idled purr of his sickly motor. Wood began to feel sick too. While he'd expected this reception, he was in no position to handle the thing. He couldn't maneuver. He couldn't step on it. Just hold to his straight-ahead glide, that was his whole bag of tricks. No tricks at all.

BUT HE HAD to take what was coming to him, and take it sitting. That's much harder, you know, than taking it standing. But once across the Meuse, though, and she'd be clear sailing for the rest of the trip. Wood had lost all but 5,000 feet of his altitude, and the motor wasn't entirely out of business yet. Sure, he'd make the grade or bust. Maybe bust was right!

Soon, to avoid an active looking hill-top behind Bazeilles, Wood turned slightly to the left. As he

turned, riding the rudder lightly, he spotted a two-place ship about half way between his 5,000 foot position and the confluence point of the Meuse and Chiers. This Hun ship was flying west. A dive would put Wood right on the two-place ship's tail, and. . .

"Bait!" something barked within Wood. Yes, the Yank guessed that quick. The thing looked too fishy, this thing of a lone two-seater flying right into the very jaws of sure destruction that waited beyond the rivers. "Bait, and lots of it," Wood told himself. "Cold meat, and I don't bite."

At the same time Wood looked above and behind for the patrol that must be covering this two-place job. He located that patrol. At 10,000, or maybe a little higher, a flight of no less than seven Hun Fokkers were covering the bait. Right away, Wood found himself wondering how he had managed to blunder in between the upper and lower enemies without being seen. But he didn't wonder long. Over his left shoulder, coming on, guns open, one Hun of the flight's high defense had picked the lone Yank for his kill.

Lieutenant Wood went into his dive. This dive wasn't going to be long, but it was far better to be forced into the ground, still on the enemy side of the rivers, than to be burned down from 5,000 feet. Even as he shoved his stick ahead to the instrument-board, the Yank tried a burst from his guns. They were on the job. He was satisfied, cut them off, saved them.

He studied the tachometer and watched it register far beyond 2,000 revs per minute. It came to a stop with its indicating finger hard against the stop pin. Man! Wood took his eyes off that! He looked that way no more. Anyway, more important to him was the trick of putting his poor old Spad between the lower two-seater and the swooping Fokker coming down from above. So he dived straight at the bait. And if he could get close enough to the two-seater, the Fokker pilot, Wood felt sure, would be forced to hold his fire for a time at least.

With a howl and a wailing of rushing ships, the distances between all three crafts shrunk. The Spad widened a bit on the following Fokker. The two-seater lost out a bit as Wood gained.

Now the bottom ship and the Meuse came very close to Wood. For the present, too, the high enemy had not been able to get close enough to do any damage. Wood glanced back and gloried in the distance between. But Wood's glory was short, for, with a sickly howl, his red-hot motor let go. It kicked a con-rod through a cylinder wall, whaled away at its

motor bearers like all hell turned loose—and suddenly stopped!

WOOD HAD QUICKLY cut his switch, and turned his gasoline valve to "off". Even with his speed, a gas smell filled the cockpit, and that hellish fear of fire blotted out all other thought. But miraculously, the motor missed catching fire; and only once in a hundred such times would a damaged motor make that miss. Well, that was that, and the first danger past, so he stuck to his dive, and did some tall thinking at the same time. Yes, he tried to think up a fast guess with the right answer. No Yank was ever done till he was dead, dead all over, and Wood wasn't that—not yet.

Meanwhile the two-seater had arrived at a place where Wood could have hit the rear-seat man with a thrown manhole cover, so close were the two ships. Now Lieutenant Wood did think fast!

In that hurried moment of thought, with dead guns, a dead motor, and more sure death on his tail, the Yank recalled an accident he'd had months before at the training center, Issoudun. Back at Field 8 they'd called that accident a boner, and chalked it up against Wood. It hadn't got Wood's goat, though. Not much!

"All experience is knowledge,"

Wood had laughed, and told the officer in charge of flying. No kidding, he said that even before the dust had settled.

"I'm going to put you on the ground for a week, lieutenant, and let you use that bit of knowledge. . . . Rank carelessness, that's what it was, lieutenant," the officer in charge had said to Wood.

This is what had happened that day: Wood had been over-anxious in making a take-off. His class was training on Nieuport-27's. As the group was about to take the air, a pilot named Rooney taxied out first. At the exact second another plane was shooting a landing. Rooney stopped taxiing to give the landing ship its right of way; and when Rooney brought his taxiing ship to a halt he was hardly a hundred feet-ahead of Wood's plane.

Wood, with his ship's tail on the ground, could not see Rooney ahead. Or, at least, he didn't see him. Perhaps he never looked. Full of pep, and as green as hell, Wood blasted full gun to his 110 h.p. Le Rhone rotary motor just as soon as he saw that landing ship hit the ground. Motor on. Wood's tail came up, and his ship's nose dropped to the horizon. He saw Rooney! In the brief moments given him for action Wood couldn't

turn right nor left. And if he were to kill his power he'd surely smash Rooney, side-on.

There was, as Wood saw the thing, only one way out, and he tried it—zoomed over Rooney's ship. Wood's wheels marked the upper wings of Rooney's Nieuport as they rolled across: and the axle of Wood's landing gear broke Rooney's propeller. Then, beyond Rooney's ship, Wood came down to a safe landing. He got out and asked Rooney if he didn't get a kick out of that. The guts of the guy! And with neither him nor his ship hurt in the least!

LIEUTENANT ROONEY did get a kick out of that. Death had passed Rooney by inches. And Rooney was serious enough to appreciate the fact. Rooney quit flying. It just broke him, ruined a good pilot for keeps. Oh, it wasn't that Rooney was yellow, but that, well it was just one of those things that you can't explain. But Wood had gone along, merrily. With a whoop.

Now, on this fighting front, closing down on that Hun two-seater, Wood recalled the accident and made up his mind to use the bit of knowledge for all it was worth. He recalled that the upper arc of a propeller's circle extends, on all ships, above the upper wing. What he had done to Rooney's propeller, by accident, he could now accomplish on the Hun through intent and good flying. And when it came to a matter of good flying. Wood was there, there will bells on. There's no limit, either, to what a good Yank will try, and accomplish, when he's put to it.

Yep, no question about it, what Wood had done to Rooney, he could do to this two-place enemy ship. That is, he could pull it off unless the rear-seat gunner should manage to knock him off first. And, right at the second, that rear Hun was whaling away at the oncoming Yank with both hot Spandaus barking.

Wood could already see some of the damage that those guns were doing; and he could guess—without much hard guessing, at that—at the damage which they were likely to work if he weren't quick enough about the job ahead. That back-seat gunner had gunned out one of Wood's right struts with his first wide-circle burst. That was just as Wood's motor went on the hummer, and as Wood's attention was entirely on his switch and gas valve. Then in a jiffy that gunner had trained his burst a bit closer to center, and the gasoline splashed down and back from the center-section reserve tank in Wood's upper wing. It had been holed.

The cool gas, coming into the Yank's face, told him

that this was the time and place for all good men to come to the support of the party. It was now or never; and now had to be right *now!* And here!

However, with a pursuit ship diving in as close as the Yank was going to dive, if that gunner stuck through it he'd sure deserve a lot of credit. Wood's heart went out to that game Hun, for he was manning his guns till the last. Manning them till Wood, coming above the two-seater's tail, could no longer see the rear man.

And the Hun pilot, he was game too. He had an automatic in his right mitt, and that automatic was vomiting lead. These two had been sent out as bait. Now, perhaps, they were to be done in, but they were going down hard. Worthy enemies! A Yank like Wood couldn't help but notice this.

In that last second, with ship upon ship, Wood glanced at his altimeter. 3000 feet. Hardly that. The wartime altimeters were always cockeyed at best.

Wood fishtailed above the other ship. The rear-seat man swung his guns under the belly of the Spad. Wood worked his landing gear into line. Then, diving through the last few feet of dividing space, he went closer, and flew, still diving with the other ship, straight along the fuselage of the under craft.

The rear-seat Hun fell away from his guns and sprawled deep in his cockpit. He, no doubt, figured that the Spad pilot intended a collision. To him it must have looked as though Wood was giving up the ghost and selling out as dearly as possible.

It was going to be a job of mighty ticklish piloting for the Yank. He had to pull the rest of the thing on his Spad's momentum. If he failed the first time, there'd be no second time. The only difference would be that he'd have two ships on his tail where there'd only been one before. And those two ships would have Wood in the clear, right out where they could hang it on him in fine style. No danger then of the Huns getting one another by cross-fire. And how they would hang it on the Yank!

THAT DIVING FOKKER—Wood took a last-second glance—was now plenty close. Also, behind that closest Fokker, the other six German pursuit planes were coming down. Coming down like six vultures, with their twelve counter-balanced ailerons tipped flat to Wood's hasty gaze. Six hellish vultures ready to work their vengeance on this single-handed lone worker from beyond the western seas. Still, that lone worker was dying hard. But he'd die sure if this swooping mob came up with him—down on him.

So, after the Hun rear-seat man decided that this Yank wasn't going to use his skull as a landing place, and after that wise Hun had pulled in his neck, in less time than it takes to tell it, Wood's stout Spad landing gear had zipped through the two-place ship's propeller arc.

Pieces of splintered blades shot into the Yank's cockpit, came right plunk through the under linen and floor boards, and Wood knew that the damage had been done. Also, as he reached for the fleshy part of his right leg, and pulled out a six-inch splinter, Wood realized that he'd been damaged somewhat too. And with that six-inch piece of propeller so extracted came much red stuff: Wood was hurt. Still, hurt or no hurt, Lieutenant Wood was one happy Yank.

In the flashing second of that passing crash, he pushed ahead on his joystick, retained his control and his gliding speed, and almost hung his own tail surfaces on the Hun's nose as he passed ahead and down. He resumed his straight-ahead dive; and a back-over-his-shoulder look told him that the two-place ship, now with its dead propeller, was going down. The German pilot had his craft headed for the Meuse. It was bound to be a wet landing; but it was the only safe landing in view.

But Wood's big moment of crashing business had given the pursuing single-seater the jump on him again. This single-seater pilot was a persistent devil too, to say nothing of the other six winged devils. Not for a moment had the nearest Hun quit shagging the Yank. And now that Wood had coldcopped the Hun flight's bait, the German flight was out to even things up.

The first Fokker was too close now for Wood's comfort; also that Hun was beginning to get too busy with his brace of guns, anxious guns that squirted tracers with rare ambition. Once again, and quickly, Wood did some fast thinking. Maybe, even yet, there'd be a way to guess an answer to this nasty situation. Hadn't he guessed before? He sure as the devil had!

The moment that saw Wood and the two-seater crash had seen him cross the Meuse into Allied territory. And that was a thing to cheer about. Burning Allicourt, Remilly and Angecourt had gone by in the last few seconds of war. Wood now had a tailwind that fanned his rudder and helped him stretch a glide as a Spad glide had never been stretched before.

Then Haraucourt, with no landing spots anywhere in sight, went past when less than 800 feet of Wood's sky was left to him. He was low. This couldn't last long.

You can't hold a Spad in your lap and make the darned thing float forever.

But, of a sudden—and here's where the Yank put out a real bit of good guessing and fast thinking—Wood recalled that, only last night, somebody in the mess had warned: "You birds want to be dam' careful when you're passing near Raucourt, because there's a nest of Yank anti-aircraft nuts on that hill above the graveyard. And all planes, Allied or Hun, look alike to them there anti-aircraft babies. They'll knock everything down that passes, knock 'em down and sort 'em out afterward, and at random."

All of this was very true. When a Yank went a-gunning, well, he went a-shootin', you bet. Our ground troops never made pets of our Yank airmen. Nor did they play favorites. No, sir, they'd as soon bag a Yank plane as a German. Save the mark! And the franc. And Raucourt was now less than two short kilometers from Wood; and, of course, from Wood's close followers, who were getting closer.

WOOD COULD ALREADY see the hill-top anti-aircraft nest. Men were on the guns, and on the alert too. The Yank pilot knew that these men were just waiting for business. Leave it to them to handle said business. That 77th Division was nasty at times. And why shouldn't they be nasty? Wasn't it a hell of a note to have a gang of New Yorkers perched on a hill above a graveyard in a dump like Raucourt? They were out to end the war.

At this stage of the game, the glass dial in Wood's altimeter shattered. The broken glass fell at his feet. He knew that the nearest Hun was putting lead right over his shoulders, or maybe right under his chin. He'd heard of other birds getting it as close as this and living to tell it too. A miss, you know, is as good as a mile. A miss, hell! This Hun bird was missing, but not missing often enough.

Wood half turned for a better look at his closest company, and the right lens of his goggles went the way of the altimeter's dial. And Wood had heard of this happening to a French pilot long ago. But that Frenchman was now dead. Scared to death, perhaps.

The Yank suddenly lost all interest in looking. Anyway, there wasn't much to look at. Couldn't a guy see seven other ships any time he cared to gaze into the sky? 'Course he could.

In order to stretch his glide and decoy the following Huns into passing over the anti-aircraft nest in Raucourt, the lone Yank felt sure he could lose no

more altitude. What he had of ceiling now, he must hold. He had hardly enough as things stood.

All seven ships were on his tail by now, and it was only through the grace of a kind heaven that he was living at all. The past—and what was following him—was in the hands of Wood's guardian angel, and Wood knew it. The future, and that gun nest at Raucourt, were things with which Wood might yet work, that is if the guardian angel took care of the rear for a few minutes longer.

Floating along in his flat glide, with little or no headway. Wood could hope to do no fishtailing nor zigzagging. Any such maneuvers tend to slow a ship; and the good Lord knew that Wood was moving slow enough as it was. Slow? You couldn't have made the Yank believe that he was moving at all, unless it was backwards.

"No, sir," Wood said, when he told about it later; "that old Spad of mine wasn't showing any signs of life, and Raucourt wasn't coming in worth a damn! Never saw a town hold off like that one did. Lucky for me that I had a good stiff tail wind kissing my rudder, or I'd never have made it at all. But I'm going to put in for lots of them there chest medals for that anti-aircraft gang. Those babies are good! What I mean, they sort 'em out before they knock 'em down, and don't let anybody tell you different."

The Spad, with less than two hundred feet under its wheels, and just oozing ahead through the last stretch of its flat glide, came across the battery above the graveyard in Raucourt. That was as it should be. The anti-aircraft outfit that had been waiting more than three hours for any kind of flying business to come its way was all set to turn loose with everything it packed, and turn loose right now!

"Hold 'er a sec'!" the sergeant on that battery yelled at the last moment. He had a hand in the air. "Wha's 'at first airguy wavin' about, eh? Who's he flirtin' wid'?"

Wood was giving them a wave as they lined their sights and swung the guns to follow him. Nice thing that, looking down at short range into the mouths of upturned guns.

"Tha's a Frog kite," one of the sergeant's men decided. "'At's what they call a Spad airplane, guy. . . He's a Ally."

"Pass one Frog!" the sergeant barked. "Line on the babies followin'! Line 'em fast! I know them others

well enough. Let 'em have it!" The sergeant's hand fell. And the battery did let 'em have it.

Don't let anybody tell you that anti-aircraft fire is all the bunk. Anyway, at 200 feet it isn't. And when a plane's been hit by anti-aircraft fire, it's been hit. Also, the pilot is dead, and dead all over.

"Maybe 'at guy didn't splash!" the Archie sergeant cheered. "Hell, they's nothin' left, not even the number!"

The battery chattered again. Six Fokkers went six ways from there and decided that, as far as they were concerned, the war was over for that day.

"An' look at that other bird, the Frog. Another good man gone wrong!" a second man of the battery remarked. He pointed to where certain parts of Wood's Spad hung in certain nearby trees. The fuselage had gone along and down into still other trees. "We guys might just as well 'ave knocked that cuckoo loose from his perch too. What's his idea of hangin' that kite up in them trees like he went an' done, eh?"

"That bird," the sergeant explained, "had a dead motor when he went over. Wha' do ya think I called ya fire on him for—'cause I love the color of his eyes, eh? Or 'cause he threw me some sweet aviatin' kisses, what?"

"Aw, ya can't always tell," the sergeant added; "first, knock 'em down, then talk it over afterwards. That's what I say. Mebbe they's Allies, an' maybe they ain't. But we surer'n hell might've knocked that baby down an' saved him the trouble of bustin' his own neck. Look at that dam' mess he's made of hisself. Rooined a bunch of good trees." Wood had, as hinted by the past talk, hung his Spad in a few trees.

An hour after landing in Raucourt, Lieutenant Wood had convinced the doctors at the Town Hall dressing station that the propeller-splintered leg wound and two machine-gun creases weren't going to keep a Yank airman away from his fodder.

Out behind Raucourt's church, Wood located a mess shack that was doing business. He borrowed a mess kit and in spite of a few bandages the gang at mess realized for the first time that that guy as hung his kite in that clump of trees wasn't a Frog. No, he was one of them dam' Air Service dudes as do their fighting in Paris, an' London, an' on the bou-le-wards . . . Yes they did! Like Billy H. Hell they did! Them there Air Service dudes sweat, they did.