

On May 8th, my birthday, I received a telegram requiring me to report to Wantage Hall, Reading for training. The course was on engines, airframes and theory of flight.

I managed to pass the exam and was sent to Shoreham for flying instruction.

My instructor was a Major Smith, very nice, and the first evening was taken up in the exposed nose of a Maurice Shorthorn. This was a test because I was required to lean right over the side at 3000 ft to adjust the aerial. If satisfactory and no air sickness or panic you were passed for training.

After only 8 hours dual control the great moment came when Major Smith jumped out and said " I think you are alright for Solo now ". I shall never forget it. The railway line was at the end of the runway and I only just cleared it to see a train roar along underneath me. However all was well but the machines were very antiquated and large.

After two weeks solo flying and landings I was transferred to Hounslow aerodrome where I was billeted with a Mrs Hunt and three daughters and it was great fun. Mr Hunt seemed always absent.

The training was intensive on B.E.2.Cs, Curtiss and finally on the famous R.E.8s doing gunnery, photography, bombing, wireless and all the rest - even night flying all alone.

Then a final week at Brooklands before posting to St Omer. My friend G.E. Abell had been with me from the start and was sent with me to fill two replacements in 21 Squadron near Poperinghe, Ypres at the beginning of August 1917.

The flying life of a pilot at that time was 25 hours and I was very apprehensive.

The Passchendaele offensive was just starting and I didn't sleep much that night (in a tent with Abell) conscious all the time of the continuous gunfire.

The next day I was sent up alone to get my bearings over the battle area and what a sight. Pock marked mud for miles with gunflashes everywhere.

Generally speaking our duties consisted of one 4 hour patrol per day - mostly ranging our own artillery on enemy batteries but included taking photographs of the enemy positions which was the worst job of all. While on this once I was chased by Richtofen's famous Circus and how I got back I don't know.

On another occasion I was hit by anti aircraft fire and my engine literally exploded. I have bits of it now which fell in my lap. When hit I was well over on the enemy side and quite thought I should come down a prisoner. My air gunner was not surprisingly screaming at me since there was no engine noise. However I managed just to make our side where I crashed in the mud and our bombs did not explode.

I remember being given Whiskey and phoning the squadron C.O. who told me to walk to such and such a spot where a tender would pick me up - it being a rule that pilots in a crash must fly again immediately to preserve 'nerves'. I can't remember what happened to my air gunner who was hurt more than I was.

It is unnecessary to relate here further experiences of my time in Flanders and France until my birthday again on May 8th 1918. Sufficient to remark that the ghastly Passchendaele battle continued until nearly Xmas with no gain worth mentioning and that the great German attack took place in March when we were shelled off our aerodrome and had to take off in a hurry only to land on a beach near Boulogne to await further orders.

I had three severe crashes, the last one in a gale and was lucky to sustain very little hurt.

At the beginning of May 1918 I developed ' flying sickness ' which if I remember aright was marked by a high pulse rate. At any rate I was sufficiently bad to be sent by ambulance to Staples military hospital for one week and then on by hospital boat and train to Hampstead. I was in Hospital there as a guinea pig for a week or two and then was released for one month's glorious leave.