

Letters From the Front

"THESE CRAZY AMERICANS," HIS REWARD FOR FLYING THROUGH THUNDERSTORM

Walter J. Shaffer, from whom letters have frequently been printed in the Harrisburg Telegraph has graduated from the landing class as recounted in his previous communication and is now making 500-mile flights.

Recently he successfully navigated a heavy thunderstorm. When he landed and his instructor asked him where he had taken shelter during the storm he told him that he had flown through it all. Throwing up his arms his teacher exclaimed "These crazy Americans, I'll give it up."

Shaffer is a son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Shaffer of Dauphin and went to France several months ago as a member of the Lafayette flying corps. Previous to that he had taken a course in flying at Essington. He expects soon to be fighting the Hun in the clouds above the front.

His latest letters follow:

Tours, France, Sept. 13, 1917

Dear Mother: Can't make this letter long because an inspection takes place at 2 p. m. and I have to dress. So allowing half an hour for dressing I only have 45 minutes to write. Of course I cannot write all there is to tell because I don't have two days. I got my dress uniform yesterday. It is very pretty, but with me inside the effect is ruined utterly. You never saw such a sun-burned boy in all your life and what with a light blue uniform it sure shows up. Ran into a whole lot of hard luck to-day in the shape of lazy moulters. Did I tell you I was promoted to the landing class. This is where one is taught how to land and then sent to solo flying—flying alone, you know. I have been down to this field which is a long way from camp, for four days and have not had a ride. Such a bunch of stallers I never did see. Between women and tushrooms nothing else is accomplished. You see, this flying field is being far away from camp and nobody to watch them, the moulters have a lovely time with the women, which makes up the daily audience. When they tire of women, which takes a long time, they fly down the field and pick mushrooms. And there you are. Little Walter sits down and fumes and frets all to no end, for a Frenchman cannot be hurried. They are not built that way. My biggest fear is that winter will be here before I have a chance to fly alone, which sure would be sad, since nothing is done in the winter.

Can't Understand Speed.

Some of the Americans must have complained last night, because this morning they sure were on the job. However, it was my hard luck to have them stop just as it came my turn, and now I will not get a chance for another week, because they only get that way once in seven days. These Frenchmen cannot understand why we are in such a hurry to get there since we will be sent right to the front. A Frenchman's method of going to flying school, you know, is to kill as much time as possible and they sure do it. Unfortunately, the moulters figured we wished to do the same thing. Two days ago I had some instruction as to how to operate a Gnome motor. To-day I get some shopwork, besides all this we have lectures every day. The higher I go in the promotion line the less time I have. So these letters will have to be unduly short, because I have not the time to write. I really should be sleeping now, as I feel tired. I will not even go flying alone, if I ever get a chance, map reading and compass will be added to my studies, and then I doubt if I'll have the time to write a postal. My monitor told me he would try me out to-night if weather was good. Glad I got my suit yesterday since all permission to Tours will be discontinued to-morrow. You see how fast our work is increasing. Will

write more first bad weather we have.

Tours, France, Thursday, Sept. 20, 1917.

Dear Mother: Had a little dose of cleaning house this week, as the French authorities decided it was for our good to have German prisoners there. They made the sure did smear things up. The whitened ceiling is also supposed to be clean. It is raining to-day, which is just my luck, because it was nearly my turn to go aloft in my second solo flight. "Solo" means just what it says—"All alone with a big audience watching every move." I had my first flight the other day, but I was too busy flying to get bashful about my audience. It was merely a strait hop and I landed with quite a bump. Now I am waiting to take the "tour de France" (tour of France) which is reaching me last night, and here it is raining this morning. Why go to the movies for thrill. One should join the solo class, there are yet some close calls. I have seen fellows go up in every state of nervousness and come down and land all right. Two days ago I watched these fellows fly alone for the first time is not conducive to a peaceful frame of mind, but after watching the bank landings they get away with, without smashing anything, my confidence has gone up considerably. The last few days we were all worried about being radiated (sent back to civil life for insubordination) because rumor got abroad that a man would be radiated for smashing two machines. Sounds sort of rough, don't it? Well, it is, but only on the machine, because pupils are rarely hurt.

Question of Nerve.

However, this rumor was squashed yesterday by the chief pilot, who said we need have no fear of radiation as long as we obeyed rules and showed some intelligence in the air. One day I asked for his radiation yesterday because he thought he was not fitted for flying. Every flight was agony for him. Yet I have seen him land a number of times without breakage. Nevertheless, he broke two machines all to sticks when he first began. He had more nerve than I have, for I maintain that saying you are afraid to fly takes more nerve than continuing until you are killed. I would not doubt he hears some funny remarks in this solo class. One fellow innocently wanted to know whether it was possible to fly with rubber boots. He was asked immediately answered him dryly: "Surely," but you might bounce on landing. After a week's hunt after the barometer, finally got a hair cure yesterday. I heard some funny remarks in this solo class. One fellow innocently wanted to know whether it was possible to fly with rubber boots. He was asked immediately answered him dryly: "Surely," but you might bounce on landing. After a week's hunt after the barometer, finally got a hair cure yesterday. I heard some funny remarks in this solo class. One fellow innocently wanted to know whether it was possible to fly with rubber boots. He was asked immediately answered him dryly: "Surely," but you might bounce on landing.

and was shot six times. Will send you pictures and films as soon as developed. Don't expect anything like Ernest because you will be disappointed. These were only snapshots. Am not taking any chances of going to Tours as they are becoming scarce in camp that if one is not back on the dot he is in Dutch, and in bad. Generally the jug for him. Besides Tours is five kilometers away and one can only get several hours' permission, so you see one must needs hurry back. Otherwise, I would give a Tours photographer a chance to display his art. Art is sure would be if he wished to give me a flattering impression of myself. I am almost as anxious to see those films finished as you are. Wonder how much I resemble a conductor? WALTER.

Tours, France, Wednesday, Oct. 3, 1917.

Dear Mother: At last I have a chance to catch up with my correspondence, for to-day is cloudy and threatening to rain any minute. Naturally there is no flying. I had to write you to tell you that just as I finished writing your last letter a messenger came into the barracks with the announcement that Shaffer had to go up for his altitude test immediately.

Takes Altitude Test.

It was quite a surprise as well as a delight to me to see a man of such name as a pupil. So I got me ready with a big bearskin-lined overcoat, a hat, and a pair of goggles. I know of a gasoline motor. This was a very delicate motor too and one had to know how to adjust it to get the best out of it. Fortunately I was trolled by two levers which look like this (Here is a V within a triangle). You notice they work on a small arc like the main engine, one big one and a little one. There are numbers on this arc and when the motor is tried out on the ground, the mechanic finds the best speed is attained is found and remembered. Well, the mechanics found the two numbers, and told me that, but unfortunately they were not the big lever was set for as soon as I left the ground. And then I had some interesting time trying to find my bearings, for there was, I suppose, a lot of forest, etc., juggling those two doggone levers all the time and when I got to my height of 1,000 feet I was still juggling. I had to stay at that height one hour and a quarter, and before I got up there I was wondering how cold I was going to get, as I had heard the solo class was a hard one. I had been so busy with feet and hands keeping the machine under control that my muscles were tense nearly all the time.

Gets Cramp in Leg.

It's surprising how much strength

the authorities give us this little book, they tell us if we land near a small town to ask for the mayor and no one else; furthermore not to pay for a thing. Listens good, don't it? Still, if one makes a forced landing the triangle must be flown all over again. Something I am not crazy to do, but I assure you, it's hard work. I finished one yesterday, and believe me a busier man you never did see, between watching my map, engine revolutions, compass, not to mention trying to keep right side up, I had my hands full. The first leg of the trip I found very easy as I had a big road and railroad to follow all the way; furthermore it was smooth sailing at 300 metres and I had little to do except keep that road and railroad in view. It being so peaceful I made the time useful by learning how to read the map better, checking up on little towns, picking out country roads and following them with my eye, and then comparing them on the map. Pretty soon I got the hang of the thing. Every little creek in the smallest road was marked, and when we came to a forest with a tiny lake in the center, there was the lake on the map.

Almost Goes Over.

And then I came down to a lower level to land, and fell into a bumpy atmosphere the like of which I never rode in before. The way I was bounced around, and I felt as if I was driving a cork, and then just as I had leveled out ready to land a puff got under the wings, and I was in the air. Fortunately the puff hit both wings evenly and sat me down flat again. It's remarkable how thirsty one gets after flying awhile. And so I was at this first landing station. Worse luck, they had no water. Nothing but cider, and when I saw the mechanic I decided I was not thirsty. It looked more like castor oil, and heaven knows I had smelt enough of that while flying. The best speed I found was 2,000 metres, and I found it very good. My luck still seems to hold because the mechanic on looking over my engine found the gasoline line broken clear in half. It's a question how much country I floated over in such blissful ignorance. I was soon off on the next tour, and it being about 3 p. m. and very hot it was getting bumper all the time. On this leg of the journey I followed a road with telegraph poles half the way—that is when I was not too busy keeping level, for even at 1,000 metres I was being bounced around. About half way there, this tour, I got a real scare. I had been so busy with feet and hands keeping the machine under control that my muscles were tense nearly all the time. It's surprising how much strength

requires to hold the rudder against a puff of wind, and after an hour of this I began to feel a cramp in my right leg. Then I was up a tree, because I knew if I straightened it out the cramp would go away. I also knew to do that, but I would have to go the rudder on one side, and I knew enough about those puts to have been riding over to know what would happen in that case. Something had to be done though, and that quick, because the cramp was getting worse; so I locked my other foot in the rudder and slowly stretched the other leg out.

Hits Rainstorm.

My! what a relief. Got to the other station OK and there they worked so long on my motor I feared I would not get back to camp that night. It was 6:30 p. m. when I started and since it gets dark around 7:30 here I figured my time would be about an hour, it sounded like an even break, so away we went. And then about half way to camp I ran into a rainstorm about 1,000 metres high. As a novel experience I had to repeat the experience, at least not as a pilot. There are too many things to worry about. In the first place the rain hits you with such force it hurts and worse yet, and what is so dangerous, it clouds one's goggles and one cannot see. I tried different ways of keeping that rain off my goggles. First I rubbed them off with my gloves at close intervals. That failing, I tried ducking my head, but there were so many drops to dodge, so I tried putting my one hand in front of the goggles and driving with the other; that worked pretty fair, and just as I had given myself up for lost, because it was hard to see the ground, I ran out of the rainstorm and came in sight of the camp. I had started to come down as soon as I hit the rain so I could see better. Thus, when I came in sight of the camp I was only 600 metres up and looking down behind a most abominable country to land in. Absolutely nothing but vineyards stretched in all directions. I had one experience with vineyards, you know, so I was not crazy about coming down there. As if in answer to my forebodings didn't that doggone engine begin to miss. Right away I began to do some more juggling and wondering whether I could glide camp was in sight. The engine picking up a little then and I immediately began climbing in order to get all the altitude I could before she stopped dead. The engine did not stop though and I soon landed, tired and sore in every muscle, but happy in the thought that I had finished one "triangle." I have to do it backward before I'm finished. One of the officers came out when I climbed out and asked me why I did not stop when I ran into the

rainstorm. And when I told him I wanted to finish the triangle and get back to camp, he shrugged his shoulders in a flobbergasted way, and said: "I give it up. These crazy Americans are beyond me." And now I will answer a few of your questions. As for the packages you sent, up to date I have only received one. As for the white bread, goodness knows where that is. None of the other packages came there, but, I think I got all your letters, although they do not arrive regularly, generally coming in twos and threes. And now if I had some of your homemade bread I could say the novel ended happily. WALTER.



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