



Biddle's Rumpler Two-Seater - Toul, France, August 23, 1918

(Major Charles J. Biddle was the Squadron Commander for the 13th Aero Squadron from its activation in June 24, 1918 until October 24, 1918, just 2 ½ weeks before the end of the war. After the war he wrote a book entitled THE WAY OF THE EAGLE. Before commanding the 13th, he served with a French squadron, The Escadrille #73 and then the Escadrille Lafayette. During his WW I service he had 7 confirmed victories.)



*Captain
Charles J. Biddle*

I will tell you something about that Rumpler two-seater I brought down last Friday morning, for it was in many ways very amusing. For about four days previous there had been a Hun coming over the camp high up every morning between 5.15 and 6 o'clock, evidently taking pictures and looking around to see what was going on behind our lines. He always got away safely as there was no one up there at that time and before anyone could leave the ground and climb up to him he would be home

again. The "Archies" used to wake us up shooting at him. I thought I would go up early and lay for him, and accordingly got myself out of bed at 3.30 on Friday morning and took off at crack of dawn about 4.45. For this sort of work I prefer to be alone, for one then has so much better chance of effecting a surprise attack and there is no chance of being caught unawares oneself by a bunch of Hun single-seaters. Climbed up to 5,600 metres and waited for Mr. Boche, remaining far within our lines so as to let him come in without scaring him off. I hung around for about an hour without seeing a thing and was beginning to cuss my luck for having picked the one morning when the Boche would not come over, when I saw far in the distance toward the lines the white puffs from our "Archie" shells. Then I made out the Hun among them, a tiny black speck on the horizon.

As soon as I saw him I turned around and flew off in the other direction, so as to get out of his way and let him come in, and also so as to put myself in the sun where he could not see me. I waited five or ten minutes while he kept sailing along into our lines, all the while gradually approaching him so that the sun was in his eyes. Finally he began to turn as though he thought he had gone far enough so I went after him, but his position was such that I could not keep my place in the sun while attacking him and he saw me before I got very close. He was only about 4,500 metres up, so by diving I overhauled him very quickly and went down under his tail with all the speed I could muster. The pilot maneuvered very well and I had a hard time to keep myself covered, but managed to get in close and gave him a burst until I had to turn away to keep

from running into him. The pilot told me afterward that he heard the observer yell when I shot so I suppose I must have hit him. The machine appeared hard hit and for a minute I thought he was going down, so laid off and waited to see what would happen, as we were so far within our lines that I had ample time for another attack if necessary. We flew along for a minute or two, the observer firing a few scattered shots at long range, and then the pilot started for his own lines again. I went after him once more and coming up under his tail gave him a good burst at short range; when I stopped shooting I suppose we were ten or fifteen yards apart. This time I did better, for I got the observer in the stomach, shot the band of cartridges on his gun so it would not work, shot the synchronizing gear on the pilot's gun so that it was out of commission, and another bullet stopped the motor. I pulled away when I got too close and watched again to see what would happen, but even then the pilot tried to plane back to his own lines. The observer had stopped shooting and I noticed his gun sticking straight up in the air, so thought he must be knocked out. There was lots of time and I climbed up over the Hun where I could look down in the observer's cockpit. There seemed to be no one there so I went down and gave him another dose, this time getting the pilot in the shoulder. By this time we were down to 2,000 metres and the pilot seeing that he could not possibly get back to his own lines, gave up and planed back into ours. I sat on his tail a couple of hundred yards away and watched him, for although it would have been an easy matter to have gone in and shot down the now defenseless Hun, it did not seem worth while when it was quite evident that he could not possibly escape. I thought at the time that it would be much nicer to get the machine intact if possible rather than simply a wreck.

We were right beside a river which ran down a little valley with quite high hills on either side. By the river was a broad green field, smooth as a prepared golf course, and the Boche made for this. He just missed some telegraph wires and then made an absolutely perfect landing without so much as a bounce. I was afraid he would try to set his machine on fire or run away, so kept circling over his head, prepared to give it to him if he tried any tricks. For several minutes no one got out of the machine, and I thought both men must be knocked out, but pretty soon the pilot jumped down and I saw him standing by



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the tail of his machine. It seemed perfect ages before any one came, and I fired my guns once or twice to attract attention. Finally I saw some French soldiers running to the plane, and then a crowd quickly began to gather around it. I went down and landed a few hundred yards away and then turned and rolled back on the ground. Just before I got to the Boche plane there was a stone sticking up out of the ground about eight inches, grown over with grass, which I failed to notice, and I think it was almost the only stone in the whole field. Anyhow I hit it and caved in one of my wheels, which allowed a wing to touch the ground and snapped off several ribs. This was a bit disgusting, but I wanted to see that Boche, so stopped my motor and hopped out.

A great crowd of soldiers and civilians came dashing across the field and in the centre, between a couple of gendarmes, was the Boche pilot. He was a little short stocky fellow and had his coat off, with some blood soaking through his shirt. Surrounded as he was by a crowd of Frenchmen who looked none too friendly, but rather as though they would like to string him up, and rather pale from the scare he had just had, he was looking pretty miserable and downhearted. I could not help feeling sorry for him, so smiled and held out my hand. He just beamed all over and shook hands with a will. Tried both French and English on him, but it was no go, as he could not understand any better than I could his German. Then the gendarmes took him off to get his wound dressed and lock him up. The wound was a mere scratch and did not penetrate more than half an inch.

By this time people had begun to come from everywhere and the place looked like the exit from a football game, the crowd was so large. I walked over to the German machine and they



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had just taken the observer out of his cockpit and laid him on the ground. Some of the Frenchmen told me he was dying, and he breathed his last just as I walked up. He was a fine big strapping fellow, twenty-one years old, and looked like a gentleman. It gave me a queer feeling to stand there and look at that dead boy whom I had never seen before, stretched out with two or three of my bullets through his stomach, his fast-glazing eyes staring wide open and that nasty yellow look just coming over his face. It is nice to get them

down on our side of the lines where one can get the machine, but on the other hand, even though you know perfectly well that you have killed a man, it seems less personal if you do not see him. They are Huns and I will without hesitation kill as many as I can, for it has to be done, but, just the same, they are human beings, and one cannot help remembering that they have a mother somewhere who will be wondering what has happened to them. I have got a little parachute to which I am attaching a note giving the names of the men and a short statement of what happened to them, and this I shall drop over the German lines the first clear day.