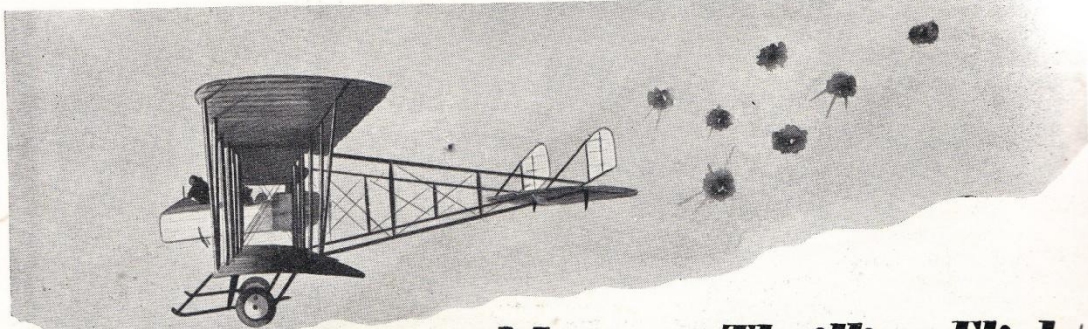


# My Most Thrilling Flight by R W Frazier







## My most Thrilling Flight

By

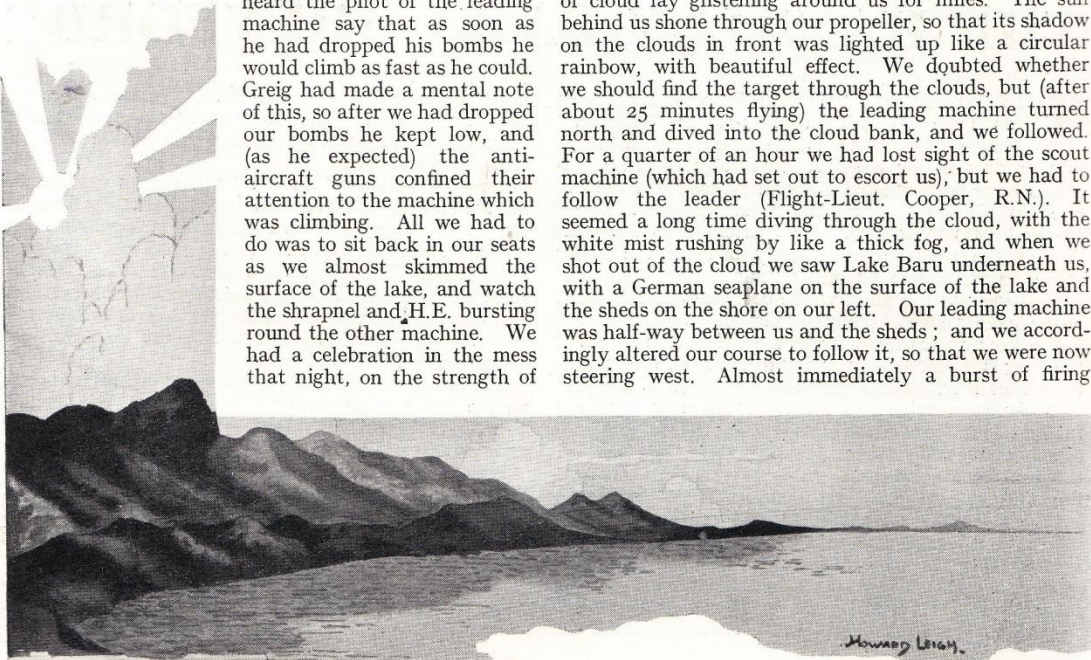
CAPTAIN R. W. FRAZIER, R.A.F. (Ret.)

*An Adventure in the land of the Heroes*

PRIOR to the events about to be narrated the Bombing Flight at Thasos Island, in the Aegean Sea, consisted of two Henri Farman machines, with Canton-Unée engines. The pilots and observers were R.N.A.S. officers from H.M.S. *Ark Royal*. On November 29th, 1916, we had made a bomb attack on the German seaplane sheds at Gereviz, near Porto Lagos, on the Bulgarian coast, and we in the second machine (No. 3916) had hit a canvas hangar with our first 65-lb. bomb, and a long wooden shed with our second. The shed caught fire, and huge flames sprang up with volumes of black smoke, as if a petrol store had exploded. We had come down to 300 ft. to drop our bombs, and before the start my pilot (Flight-Lieut. Greig, R.N.) had heard the pilot of the leading machine say that as soon as he had dropped his bombs he would climb as fast as he could. Greig had made a mental note of this, so after we had dropped our bombs he kept low, and (as he expected) the anti-aircraft guns confined their attention to the machine which was climbing. All we had to do was to sit back in our seats as we almost skimmed the surface of the lake, and watch the shrapnel and H.E. bursting round the other machine. We had a celebration in the mess that night, on the strength of

the damage, and next day the conditions were unfit for flying.

On December 1st, 1916, the Squadron-Commander decided to repeat the performance, and finish off the remaining seaplane sheds. I had my doubts about the wisdom of this, as a low altitude bombing raid in broad daylight was the daring sort of thing one can do once, but not twice. After leaving the aerodrome we travelled 40 miles east along the coast at 5,000 feet with a bank of white clouds beneath us. They stretched as far as we could see, and were a lovely sight with the sun shining on them. It was like flying over a glacier, and the billows of cloud lay glistening around us for miles. The sun behind us shone through our propeller, so that its shadow on the clouds in front was lighted up like a circular rainbow, with beautiful effect. We doubted whether we should find the target through the clouds, but (after about 25 minutes flying) the leading machine turned north and dived into the cloud bank, and we followed. For a quarter of an hour we had lost sight of the scout machine (which had set out to escort us), but we had to follow the leader (Flight-Lieut. Cooper, R.N.). It seemed a long time diving through the cloud, with the white mist rushing by like a thick fog, and when we shot out of the cloud we saw Lake Baru underneath us, with a German seaplane on the surface of the lake and the sheds on the shore on our left. Our leading machine was half-way between us and the sheds; and we accordingly altered our course to follow it, so that we were now steering west. Almost immediately a burst of firing





broke out, and the bullets started to splinter the bottom of the nacelle—the body of the machine in which we were sitting. This kept on for several seconds, and the machine gave a heave which nearly capsized us. Greig got her under control again, however, and I was expecting to feel myself hit any second by the bullets splintering the machine.

When the burst of firing ceased, and I had felt nothing, I moved each limb separately to see if I had a sharp twinge of pain, as I had read of men being wounded in the heat of conflict and not feeling it at the time. Rather to my surprise I found I was all right, and as the firing had now ceased for the moment, Greig leaned back and yelled into my ear (above the noise of the engine) that he was hit. This had doubtless been at the moment when the machine nearly got out of control. I had not been able to see where the bullets came from (as we had not observed another sea-plane waiting for us aloft), but I had dropped two light 16-lb. bombs in retaliation. By this time our leading machine had nearly got to the target, and was already under fire from the anti-aircraft guns. I shall always remember that scene: the December sun setting like a red ball on the horizon, our leading machine silhouetted in jet black against the flaming background of the sky, with black puffs of smoke from the shell bursts all around it, and flashes from the guns and its own bursting bombs on the ground below. It occurred to me that, in a damaged machine, with the pilot wounded, and the anti-aircraft guns getting the range on the first machine, we stood a poor chance.

We flattened out when we had descended to 300 feet, and as we approached the target our machine was tossed about like a ship in a rough sea by the shells bursting. Greig managed to keep her flying, though he could not get her under control sufficiently to pass right over the target, so we did not drop our bombs. We next passed over a company of infantry who were drilling, and (as they happened to have their rifles loaded) they, of course, gave us a volley. We had kept our flying speed, and were out of range of the anti-aircraft guns, but the machine was too damaged for Greig to think of returning over the target to drop the bombs, and he held on to his course for Thasos. The machine was evidently in a bad way, side-slipping first to one side and then to the other, and—instead of the slight movement of the wheel which was usually enough—one or two complete turns in each direction were necessary to keep the machine level. She would also lose height rapidly for several seconds, as if we were going to crash badly, then she would pick up again and climb slightly.

This went on alternately (with occasional side-slips as variations) for several minutes, with the machine

flopping about in the air like a wounded crow. I, as the observer, had simply to sit there and calculate our chances of getting back or being taken prisoners, according to the varying condition of the machine. The bombs were another problem, as we still had them on board. I did not want to worry Greig about them, as he had his hands full with the machine, and I knew that we were

below the height of minimum safety, so that if I got rid of them then as dangerous cargo we should be bound to be hit by the fragments. It soon became obvious that the elevator controls were not working, and the machine lost height more and more and ultimately got into a spin.

I next saw one of the funniest sights I ever saw, a Bulgarian peasant or shepherd who thought we were chasing him to drop bombs on him, who ran round in circles to get out of our way. He stretched his legs farther than I have ever seen any man do, before or since, and each time our machine circled in the spin he evidently thought we were making for him. I could not help laughing at this, although in another minute or two something serious was going to happen. It was impossible to flatten out in the ordinary way on landing, as the elevator controls had been shot away, but Greig managed to give the machine a tilt so that one wing-tip hit the ground first. The two planes on that side crumpled up, the nacelle in which



Captain R. W. Frazier in the uniform of an Observer-Lieutenant, R.N.

we were sitting then hit the ground, the under-carriage being squashed flat beneath it, while the bombs went flying in all directions. By the greatest good luck the safety catches held and not one of them went off! Greig was thrown out into a tangle of scrap-iron, which a second before had been the steering wheel, instruments, and wheels of the under-carriage, while I was held in my seat by my belt. The sudden stop, the grinding and crunching of the machine hitting the ground, and the pilot being thrown forward, all reminded me of the sensation of being in a swift toboggan which runs off the snow into a patch of ashes.

When we had set out we had had to climb into the nacelle about 5 feet above the ground, but after we had crashed I might have been sitting in an armchair on the grass. I simply had to undo my belt and step out. It occurred to me that it was a miracle we were still in the land of the living, after having crashed with a cart-load of bombs on board (including two 65-pounders), and that we were now prisoners of war.

My first job was to assist Greig to rise from the tangle of ironmongery in which he was lying, and to help him to a seat on a hummock of grass, as his wounded leg was already stiffening. He was afraid the tracer bullets in our Lewis gun pans would be mistaken for explosive bullets, and that we should both be shot for having them. I therefore collected our Lewis gun pans, and for a minute

(Continued on page 104).



**MY MOST THRILLING FLIGHT**—(Continued from p. 75) or two was spinning them round over a gorse bush, so that the bullets fell out and into the bush, where I hoped they would lie hidden. It was no good, however, as they fell right through the bush and out on to the ground.

We now saw a line of infantry approaching at the double, with a man on a horse in front. He rode up to us ahead of the infantry and saluted, and asked in French if we were French. We told him we were English. The infantry arrived and crowded round us and the machine. They made me nervous by carelessly kicking our bombs where they lay scattered about on the grass. One of them picked up our Lewis gun, which had been broken in the crash, and examined it curiously, as well he might. It was not fitted to a proper machine-gun mounting, but had a rifle butt, and was meant to be held against the observer's shoulder, and used as a rifle. Luckily, we never had to use it, as only two small arcs of fire were possible—one on each side of the pilot's head in front, the planes and engine being in the way for firing backwards, as it was a pusher machine. Another Bulgar tried to snatch Greig's cap, which had the fur outside, and was obviously a good one, but one of his companions prevented him.

A Red Cross man appeared, and (after slitting Greig's breeches) put some iodine on the two bullet wounds and bandaged them. I did not hear till three months later (when Greig arrived at Philippopolis prison camp from hospital) that he had not realised the man with the long knife was a Red Cross man, and that for a minute or so he was in terror of being murdered. He managed to hide his fright pretty well, as it never occurred to me what he was thinking. They then hoisted Greig on to his feet, and we made our first acquaintance with a word which we were to hear constantly during the next two years: "Haidi." This is a word also used by the Turks (with whom it originated), meaning: "Come along."

Just as we started we thought of our caps in the machine, and I got permission from an officer to go and fetch them. We had had a useful tip to fly always with our caps handy, so that if captured we could show we were officers. I took a last look at our machine as I got our caps out of the nacelle. The upper and lower planes, on the side which had hit the ground first, were smashed and crumpled up, and on the other side they had come adrift from the struts. Torn fabric was flapping about in the slight wind blowing, the nacelle was resting on the ground, the engine was falling forward on to the petrol tank, and the tail-booms were bent. We later heard from Flieger-Leutnant von Rappert (of the Imperial German Navy, the pilot of the seaplane) that there were 97 bullet holes in the planes. He had got on our tail and had fired the first burst, from which Greig was wounded. It did not matter much that there had been no time to set fire to our machine before the Bulgars arrived, as she would never fly again.

Our leading machine was shot down in the sea on the return journey, but von Rappert was able to rescue Cooper and his observer (Lieut. Viscount Torrington, R.N.V.R.), who both luckily disentangled themselves from their sinking aeroplane, and were assisted into the seaplane by the German N.C.O. gunner.

The four of us attempted to escape in September, 1918, with the sad result that Greig died from a bullet wound from a sentry's rifle.

**NIGHT LIGHTS FOR ARMEN**—(Continued from p. 72) of the beam and the pilot's eyes. One light of this type will be sufficient for any aerodrome, and being built like a lighthouse for sailors, it can withstand storms of wind and rain without any ill effects.

Like all other forms of transport, flying must be conducted at night as well as by day, to be of maximum value to the traveller or for mails and freight. At the present day many thousands of miles of air routes are operated regularly at night, mostly in the U.S.A. and Germany, but their extension throughout the world depends more on the provision of lighting facilities such as those mentioned in our imaginary flight to Heston than on anything else. No landing ground or aerodrome can be considered an airport, which should mean a safe harbour in all weathers both by day and by night, until it is equipped with the maximum amount of light within reasonable limits of cost.

## ROYAL AIR FORCE OLD COMRADES ASSOCIATION

**F**OLLOWING the meeting held on February 28th further well attended and enthusiastic meetings were held on March 14th and 28th. Several new members were welcomed. On March 14th Mr. R. F. Iles exhibited some new pictorial posters on which he was warmly congratulated. The Secretary reported that the artist was prepared to supply copies to members who had facilities for advertising the Association and its objects.

An interesting collection of war-time photographs owned by members was produced during the evening. After approving the Secretary's and Committee's reports, and dealing with the business formalities of the meeting, the members provided a social entertainment, which revealed the existence of considerable talent within their ranks. Songs, stories and conjuring feats were contributed by Flight-Lieut. Goring, D.S.O., M.C., Messrs. Smith, Holmes, Coleman and Bedford.

A surprise item was furnished by Mr. C. Barling, who has recently arrived in this country from Singapore, and who bewildered everyone with his manipulation of silver currency, his performance being received with well-merited applause, to which the Scottish section contributed unstintingly. The accompanists were Messrs. Holmes and Coleman, and community singing led by Mr. T. A. Badger.

At an informal meeting on March 28th, Captain Tarker in the chair, the Hon. Secretary, F./O. H. Hackett, reported the receipt of enquiries and correspondence resulting from the report of the Association in POPULAR FLYING, and the meeting expressed its appreciation of the Journal's support. Artists during the evening were Messrs. Coleman, Badger, Harlow, Clark and Chapman; Mr. M. Loufer was elected O.C. Records (gramophone). Captain Tarker announced that the nucleus of a regular concert party had already been formed, which, it was hoped, would prove popular.

**The Hon. Secretary would be pleased to hear from prospective members.** Correspondence should be addressed to 4, Stanton House, High Road, London, N.22. Telephone, Mountview 2228.