

Their Great Adventure

By ROGER F. CHAPIN and CLAIRE B. LAIRD,
with assistance from J. J. SMITH¹

"It was September 18th, 1918 in France, a very cloudy day – no sane man would fly, so the pilots and observers of the 11th Aero Squadron (Day Bombardment) were doing what flyers will do on a day off. They were scattered all over the area. Some were ferrying new replacement planes back to the Squadron – and mine was one of them. But I was writing letters home and to my best girls. September 18th, 1918 – I'll never forget it – was the luckiest day of my life.

"After I finished the letters I strolled down to Headquarters to drop them in the mail, and as I did so the C.O., Lt. T.D. Hooper, dashed out and grabbed me by the arm. "Get your flying clothes on and come with me. We've got to make a raid on La Chaussee." He went on by, muttering something about kiwis who ordered men to fly in this kind of weather. Though he wasn't required to fly on raids he would not order his men to fly in weather he would not fly in.

"I ran to my quarters to get my flying suit on. I know I broke all records going and coming, but when I got back to Hqrs. no Hooper was in sight. I dashed around trying to find him and ran to the flying field only a hundred yards away. The formation had just taken off and was almost out of sight. Then I found out from Lt. Moulton, the Adjutant, that Lt. Root had come by already with his flying clothes on so Hooper had grabbed him and flown off.

The starting formation consisted of:

- Lts. Chapin and Laird, leaders in Plane No. 16
- Lts. Tyler and Strauch in Plane No. 11
- Lts. Hooper and Root in Plane No. 1
- Lts. Oatis and Guthrie in Plane No. 12
- Lts. Comegys and Carter in Plane No. 14
- Lts. Harter and Stephenson in Plane No. 4
- Lts. Osmun and Edwards in Plane No. 10

"Being young and rambunctious (I was 20 at the time), I was fit to be tied – to think that the C.O. wouldn't wait 10 seconds for me – cheated me out of a good fight. So I went to the little town of Amanty, where the Mayor owned the local bistro, and also had a good looking daughter. I proceeded to regale her with the life and adventures of an aviator. After spending all of my francs I went back to the barracks to commiserate with myself.

"As I was sitting there on my bunk somebody jumped on me from behind; it was Jim Garlough, my pilot, who had returned from his ferry trip and had been told I had gone with Hooper and that the six planes were lost. (Oatis and Guthrie had not returned yet). So when he came in he saw me and pounded me, jumping all over, and was overjoyed that I had escaped an appalling disaster. Six fliers killed in action, four made prisoners of war, two saved by expert flying and shooting. Over 83% casualties! *Amicum perdere est damnorum maximum!*

"I'll bet that Ralph Root does not know to this day the circumstances of the switch or even that the switch took place. That is the tale of my luckiest day, and as I now tell it to my four children, eleven grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren – I wonder whatever happened to the Mayor's fair daughter."

That was a letter written by Robert C. Payton of Closter, New Jersey on Jan. 29, 1973 to all of the members of the 11th Aero Squadron, U.S. Air Service, some 55 years after the event. By now a goodly number of them had passed on, many of them killed in action or wounded in the Great War, but he was writing to invite all to join him on a trek to Europe with the World War One Overseas Fliers.

The day described, September 18th, was at the beginning of the final struggle of the War. The American troops, launching the St. Mihiel Drive, pushed the sharp spear of the German-occupied position (pointing on the French town of St. Mihiel (or what was left of it) back a distance of nearly twenty miles in four days. The struggle was to end less than two months later in the holocaust of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and its aftermath.

The pilots and bombardiers of the 11th Aero Sqdn, in American-made DeH.-4's, were ordered out that day to bomb La Chaussee in very poor weather – in fact, as the formation of seven planes, led by Lts. Chapin and Laird approached the village of La Chaussee they ran into a wall of clouds. Falling out of formation in the gloom each of them came out to be greeted by nearly a dozen German aircraft, and as they went down to get under the clouds they were driven up again by intense ground fire. Of the seven D.H.-4's leaving with the C.O., only two returned, with Lts. Oatis and Guthrie badly shaken and well shot up, and Lts. Osmun and Edwards, returned by engine trouble.²

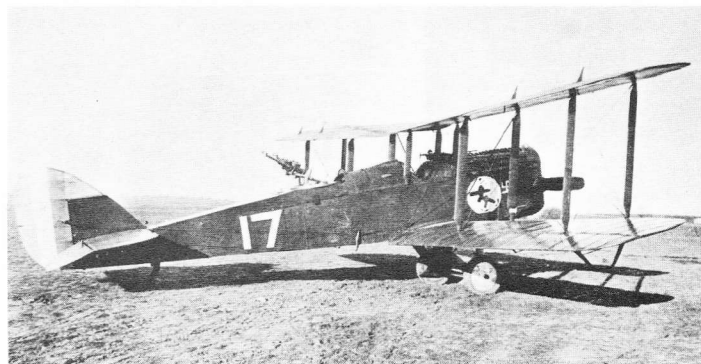
The day ended with pilots Chapin and Hooper and bombardiers Laird and Root as POW's. The other teams of Tyler and Strauch, Comegys and Carter, and Harter and Stephenson were killed in action. In the aftermath the squadron had to rebuild with new aircrew and machines flown up from Collombey-les-Belles, but the replacements had not the experience of the flight that was lost. All of those men had been with the Squadron since its reorganization for the Zone of Advance, and Chapin, Laird, Tyler and Strauch had been flying with French squadrons for over two months before coming to the 11th.

Roger F. Chapin's diary of events, kept in very terse sentences throughout the War, reveals the typical advance of the Air Service pilot or observer/bombardier from enlistment to the Armistice. Chapin trained in primary flight instruction with the group of cadets at Mineola airfield on Long Island. Along with the rest of the complement of flying and ground crew personnel he went to England, then was assigned to finish training at Clermont-Ferrand. His diary takes up on June 7th, 1918:³

June 7 – Big day. Orders came to leave tonight for 8 teams, a good bunch of boys to go out with to a French escadrille. Boarded Paris train at 11:00 p.m.

June 8 – All night trip on the train, very uncomfortable, with little sleep. Reached the "big city" at 7:00 a.m. and reported to headquarters. Went from there to Orly for equipment, then returned to Paris for a look around the city, beautiful at this time

DeH-4, No. 17 of the 11th Aero Squadron, with Lts. Garlough and Payton as pilot and observer, never once failed to get over the enemy's territory in sixteen raids and return to base. (11th Aero)



of year. In certain places the effect of the German guns and bombs were evident. Many refugees throng the station, and southbound trains are packed to the limit. We arrived at Chartres after a tiresome ride, third class. As usual no one expected us; the town was packed, with no accommodations. A Signal Corps Sergeant found a couple of rooms for us in a deserted house, most acceptable in spite of the dirt. There is a noted cathedral here.

June 9 — Sunday — Someone finally claimed us at 12:00 noon and we were under way in a camion to Geherville. The billet was in a loft, fairly clean but mighty hot. Gathering from all the dope, we expect to get a couple of weeks of finished flying here before leaving for a French escadrille.

June 10 — Up and at 'em at 5:00 a.m. Long walk to hangars, and rain prevents us from flying, so back we tramped. The long hike to the field in the afternoon netted me a hop in a Corps de Armee Breguet, a real bird, that handled better than a Nieuport, best ever.

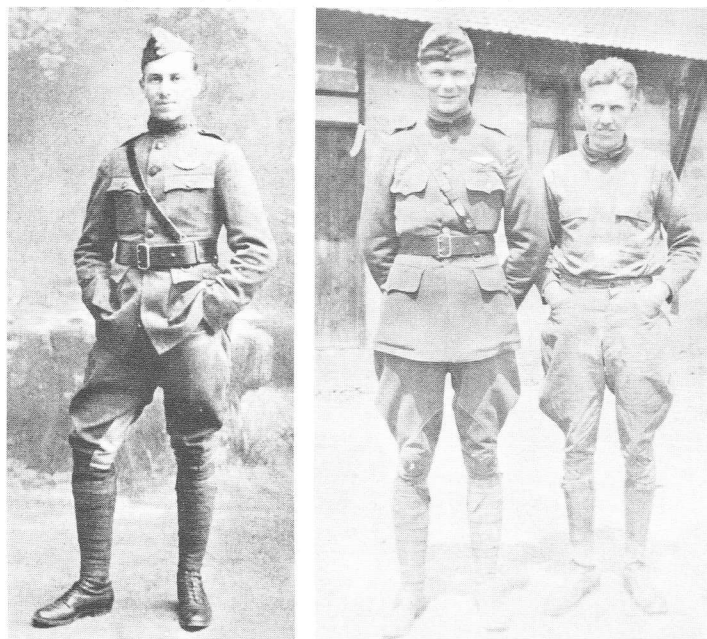
June 12 — Tramped to flying field in the morning; broken machine prevented our flying. In p.m. we all worked into three rides in a Renault Corps de Armee Breguet. Best ship on the field, landings very good.

June 14 — Foggy, no flying. Started packing, expect to move soon. In p.m., no flying schedule being announced, no one started for the field. At about 6:00 p.m. Capt. Boal called up, all excited, demanding our presence at the field immediately. He threatened to send us to Tours for disobedience of orders. But since we proved that the lack of orders kept us from going to the field, we were dismissed after a heated trial.

June 15 — Saturday — We leave Geherville Chartres at 4:00 a.m., arrive at Chateaudon at noon. French officials met us and we were assigned to billets in town with private families. I drew a very good room overlooking the promenade. Went to the field with Capt. Parks in p.m. to learn what our schedule will be.

June 18 — At field early, spent about 50 rounds in aerial gunnery shooting at a ground target from an airplane. Good sport. Too windy at field in p.m. for flying. Rumor is that we will get away soon. After dinner a gathering at the cafe, then to bed early.

Left, Lt. Thornton D. Hooper served as the first commanding officer of the 11th Aero Squadron when it was sent to the Zone of Advance in August 1918. At right are Lts. Laird and Chapin, the lead crew on the ill-fated bombing mission of 18 September. (Photos — left, from the *History of the 11th Aero Squadron*; right, from album of Roger Chapin)



June 19 — Awaiting orders from Capt. Boal. Rainy day, no flying. Capt. Parks came with French Escadrille orders. Gatton and I, with King and "Laddie" are assigned to Br. 127.

June 21 — 5:00 a.m. train for Plessis-Belleville. Escadrille Br. 127 is very comfortably located, we are billeted in a French cottage and eat out meals at the Chateau. Willson, Cotton, Kyle and other Americans are here.

June 22 — Saturday — Our first flight in formation as observers to look about a bit. Windy.

June 24 — Up at 3:00 a.m., watched bombing formation get away, but there was no machine for Gat or me. Laddie and King went. Quiet trip, dropped bombs on German town.

June 25 — Test hop in Corps de Armee Breguet, poor old ship, but we got away with it.

June 27 — Up at 4:00 a.m. after a noisy night of barrages by Boche. Watched formation get away, with hope to get our new planes tomorrow.

June 28 — About midnight a heavy barrage kept me and Gat awake. Many German planes overhead, much falling shrapnel of roofs about us. Flew late afternoon practice formation around Paris.

June 29 — Very quiet day, windy, no flying. SPAD landed in field very much shot up. To bed early; good night for a raid.

July 2 — To Paris with Laddie, Bud, Cotton, and Gat in a Fiat to draw pay. No time to stay, due to fly at 6:00 p.m.

July 4 — Captain granted Paris permission; Gat, Cotton, Lehr and I went, spent most of day looking for warm flying suits and gloves. Very festive day in the city.

July 5 — Left Plessis-Belleville for new field farther south at St. Dizier. Flew formation, taking my mechanic with me.

July 6 — Saturday — No flying. Mechanics and supplies arrived by road. Another night billeted in hospital.

July 9 — Prepared maps in morning, went over machine in p.m., pretty old bird. Orderly woke me about midnight announcing bombing trip for 5:00 a.m.

July 15 — Alerte at 4:00 a.m. On account of clouds we started out in formation of three planes, but we were lost for three hours in the clouds at all altitudes; very tiring. Rendezvous again at noon, bombed in big formation against advancing troops. Plenty of anti-aircraft fire bursting all around.

July 16 — Alerte all day. Left field at 4:30 p.m. well loaded with bombs for low bombing. Motor poor, fell behind but again caught the formation over the lines and bombed with them.

July 17 — Alerte all day. Germans retreating. We are attached to IVth Army, awaiting orders.

July 18 — Still on alerte. Left field heavily loaded about 2:00 p.m., could not make the grade. We fell hopelessly behind and below, returned to field.

July 19 — Promised a new machine any day now. Hard to get. The bombing trip at 5,000 meters excludes us in our bum airplane. Many others returned, couldn't make it either.

July 24 — Packed in morning. About 4:00 p.m. we flew in formation to our new location near Sezanne, took King with me. Small field.

July 25 — Went over lines in old No. 2 at about 3,000 feet. Pretty sturdy climb for an old ship in cloudy and bumpy weather.

July 26 — Review in morning by French General who presented medals to French troops. He spoke of the effective bombing in the past offensive.

July 27 — Sunday — Went over the lines this morning in a good

ship at about 5,800 meters. Very cloudy and cold. Up over three hours. Couple of fingers retired with cold. Munier smashed and Longway lost.

August 7 — Escadrille moved up to near Montdidier. Didn't bring my new plane; had to ferry it back to near Paris. From there I traveled all night as far as Romilly, slept in a chair in a cafe.

August 7 — Took 6:30 a.m. train for Sezanne, arrived about noon. Have new machine, new mechanic. Throttle bad, and I got lost, landed at American airdrome.

August 10 — Alerte all day. Low bombing trip north of Montdidier about sundown. Strong anti-aircraft bursts. Quite a trip.

August 11 — Sunday — Strenuous trip over lines at about 5,300 meters during three hours of flying. In p.m. flew over at low altitude, met Boche plane. A little fighting excitement. Lt. Casius in his Breguet did not return.

August 17 — Through channels, from Orly to Paris to Headquarters, our opposition to being returned for service with American (squadron). Little hope.

August 18 — Sunday — Received orders from American HQ withdrawing us from Escadrille Br. 127. Sad news, as we hate to leave the French association. Mighty happy days of work. Laddie, King and I receive decorations for work in offensive at low meters.

August 19 — With many regrets, Laddie, Joe, Gat and I leave old Escadrille Br. 127. Capt. Petit thanks us for our work. Spent night in Paris. Reported to Orly as expected. No one knows why we were ordered back.

August 28 — Off to Colombey-les-Belles with bombing bunch, all day travel, very tiresome. We got to Toul, but no one claims us.

August 29 — Report at Colombey, bum around all day, looking at Liberty motors. Leave Colombey at 7:00 p.m. for Aero Squadron at Delouze. Spent night on floor.

August 30 — Walked into Gondrecourt, try to locate army cots, nothing doing, return wearily for another night on the floor. We have been spoiled by good treatment with the French.

August 31 — Move into former 166th Squadron barracks. At last a bunk with real straw to sleep on.

Sept. 1 — Sunday — Went to Colombey-les-Belles to ferry back a new Liberty motored DeH.4. Some motor. Nearly busted into woods because of switch and throttle trouble. Only ten feet to spare from hitting woods.

Sept. 5 — Rained all day, walked to Gondrecourt, bought a bed roll and got a much needed hot bath.

Sept. 6 — We started to ferry our new machines to Amanty. Several crashes caused by the wind "T" being the wrong way. Storm prevented any other activity.

Sept. 7 — Balance of our machines to Amanty. Most of the motors worked very well; Liberty motor seems better every day.

Sept. 8 — Rained all day. Kept busy taxiing airplanes to scattered hangars, their first time under cover for weeks.

Sept. 9 — Rotten weather. Fourteen new pilots and observers are assigned to our Squadron.

Sept. 10 — Rained all day. Orders came in after supper, probably an offensive in the morning.

Sept. 11 and 12 — Rain — rotten flying weather. We are ordered to report to Toul to patrol with SPADs. Clouds very low, and rain. Land safely at Toul too late to go on patrol. Return to field.

Sept. 13 — Weather still rotten. Took off twice but had to turn back, couldn't see a bloody thing.



Chapin (in cockpit) and Laird in a training Breguet during early period with French Squadron Br.127. The observers' window and port for fuselage fuel tank are revealed in this unusual closeup view. (Chapin album)

Sept. 14 — First bombing trip to Conflans. Laddie and I lead the formation. Big fight with many Boche. One of our planes down, Shidler, failed to return. Two Boche planes sent down. Shoemaker also fails to return. All our machines were full of holes. For a new crowd we put up a good fight. ("Laddie"—Lt. Laird)

Sept. 15 — Two mechanics hurt, one Liberty plane crashes on takeoff. Small formation made attack on Roye. A rod went through my crankcase. Fire, water, oil, and a long glide to our lines — just made it. Gat followed me down as protection, in plenty of anti-aircraft fire. I landed safely east of Verdun and was picked up by American engineers. Spent a pleasant evening with them, but sleep was disturbed by rats.

Sept. 16 — Spent all day on road from Verdun in car furnished by HQ, 5th Army Corps."

We leave the diary of Lt. Chapin at this point.

The first four days of the St. Mihiel Offensive were the most hard fought in the history of the U.S. Air Service to that date. As can be seen, the 11th Aero Squadron put up a particularly hard battle against the weather and the enemy. The weather was a major factor affecting operations all along the Western Front. The September rains kept the flying field so soft that wheels of the DeH.4's sank and the propeller tips often splintered in the mud. Bombs, fuel and oil had to be wheeled in handcarts at great difficulty to the airplanes, and after a shower takeoffs were impossible, delaying many missions.

At 2:00 a.m. of the morning of the 12th, the St. Michiel Offensive opened and the entire Squadron was alerted to take part in a bombing raid at daybreak. Squadrons of SPAD fighters were to accompany the bombers over the lines, but plans to rendezvous over Toul failed; the SPADs were too fast for the heavily loaded bombers, and the mission of the 11th Aero to Vigneulles was not greatly successful. Only Lt. Walter Stahl reported damages to the target.

In the raid to Conflans seven DeH.4's took part, headed by Lts. Chapin and Laird, as the flight leaders. Conflans was nearly twenty miles behind the enemy lines, with heavy anti-aircraft fire all the way. Lt. Fred T. Shoemaker went down, crashed and lay in a German hospital five days before regaining consciousness. His bombardier, Lt. Robert N. Groner, was made P.O.W. Lt. Horace Shidler also crashed and was made prisoner, but his bombardier, Lt. Harold H. Sayres died of injuries received in the crash. Lts.

Rueben Biggs and Hal T. Greer were credited with shooting down one of the enemy.⁴

On the day that Chapin and Laird were forced down by engine failure, Sept. 15th, only Lt. Hooper, and his bombardier Lt. Root, reached the target, Mars la Tour. Lt. Oatis, with Lt. Guthrie crashed at a French aerodrome, but their bomb load did not explode. Almost at the same time Lt. Clay Stephens, from the 20th Bomb Sqdn., stalled from fifty feet and was killed.

Lt. Thornton D. Hooper had taken over the formation of the 11th Aero Squadron ground echelon as it arrived at St. Maxient from England in mid-August, and was in command when the aircrew officers reported at the Squadron's base at Amanty in early September. In only these few days and weeks he had become known as a very competent commander, solicitous of the men's welfare, knowledgeable of the equipment and of the operations to be performed, and a great potential leader. The proof of this came when, as he was readying the flight for takeoff on the mission of September 18th, someone said he was not required to make the raid as C.O., but he said merely, "I can't send you fellows over unless I go myself."

Lt. Ralph R. Root was also on the alert, suited up, and though he usually flew with Lt. Allsopp, he went along with Hooper. Hooper ordered out ten planes for the raid, but those of pilot Lts. Gatton, Slauson, and Munn could not take off because of engine refusal to start or run up satisfactorily. Thus it was that seven had gone into the mist as Lt. Payton ran to the field.

Many years later, in 1965, Roger Chapin and Claire "Laddie" Laird exchanged a number of letters, and Chapin recalled his version of "Their Great Adventure" as follows: (writing to Laird)

"Harrassed as it were by clouds at all altitudes we circled on over the vicinity of Mars la Tour with the purpose of bombing a concentration of troops. A funnel shaped break in the clouds exposed a brief vision of our objective and you signalled "drop the eggs." To me it seemed that instantly we were jumped by numerous planes. I remember you were firing a burst or two, then as I missed your usual continuous and comforting staccato, I turned, and was shocked to see you leaning against the guns, covered with raw gasoline.

"In less time than it takes to tell I spotted a Boche plane under us — with my gas pressure gone, a sputtering motor, and a sinking plane. One of our flight was in back of us, cruising along a blazing, horrible but glorious spectacle, with the game observer's guns still spitting fire. More diving Huns, and the picture was lost to sight as we became swallowed in a big deep cloud — in the clutches of old man gravity. Attempted succor from the gravity fuel tank was rewarded by an occasional half-hearted revolution of a starved or crippled engine.

More recollections: Suddenly coming from the deep layer of clouds, expectantly awaiting the finish from a Hun plane. Surprise at not being followed down. A glance at the — lake? Near Thiacourt? Aware of a damaged rudder control. Machine gun fire coming up from the ground rapidly — low telephone wires against the horizon — an impending crash. Ignition shut off — and crash and blissful unconsciousness. (The next few minutes you suffered all yourself.) A hazy coming-to on the ground with a seemingly cracked skull — oh la la! Hun boots in line with my vision — the uniforms of a much agitated assembly of soldiers — a German officer thrusting himself into the inner circle. Finally, being subjected to a search of all my pockets, and of you with both legs perforated with bits of explosive bullets.

"Could we walk?" "We must, as we were too near the Front." A couple of bursting American shells convinced us!

"There was an escort sergeant in the lead and two tough privates with fixed bayonets at our backs. As we tramped in the approaching dusk we consoled each other, 'We would expect the worst and accept anything better.' As we trudged back our impressions were of the troops, horse transport (lack of motorized equipment), and artillery moving up under cover of darkness. The orderliness and quiet efficiency of this convinced us that the German machine was still a powerful, surging factor to be dealt with.

"There were hours of this hiking, tortured by the mention, and anguish, over the fatal raid. Who was living? Who was sacrificed? Who would report at squadron headquarters that night? Also, where were we bound and would our guards unanimously agree to deliver us to our destination?

"We arrived in a town alive with concentrated troops and were ushered into a candle-lighted room to face a stern looking German officer, and a third degree. Names? Where were we from in the States? (Our German Captain): 'I know something of Boston but am more familiar with New York and Philadelphia having lived in the States a few years.'

"A squad of soldiers marched us off into the mysterious night, and spurred on by rough shoulders that expressed much we were led into a basement guard room and allotted to a corner, where we wearily passed out. The next morning we were returned to the German captain, who informed us that we would have to continue our travel to the rear as he was going forward to the lines. However, he kindly shared his meagre breakfast with us, and in parting said, 'I hope your stay in Germany will not be too bad.' An officer *and a gentleman*.

"Late that afternoon we arrived in the town of Jocup (?) and were turned over to more German intelligence officers (who again spoke perfect English). After much mental sparring we were urged to give them our squadron location so they could drop a line (bomb?) on our airdrome, informing our comrades of our present status, etc. After this and several deadlocks we were assured that a big meal would be our reward, for lack of commissary up to this time. Escorted to the municipal jail, we drew a dirty cell and awaited the promised eats.

"A huge Prussian officer visited us shortly and in no gentle manner asked us if 'The Americans intended cutting off the Metz Salient?' and when 'the war was going to end?' Not feeling too amiable, to the first question we answered that we understood the German Army had an Intelligence Service and should know what was going on. To the second: It was strictly up to them. Apparently our remarks peeved him for he vehemently assured us that we would 'be in Germany a long time.' The glowering look and slamming door meant to us that it was goodbye to that promised meal. We guessed rightly.

"Through our cell bars we were surprised and pleased to have a few words with Lt. Clark Bradshaw and an Englishman, Hall, who had been shot down a few days before. Everyday for a week we were subjected to cross examination by various Intelligence officers who surprised us by continuously acknowledging information they had concerning personnel of different U.S. Aero Squadrons.

"In a few days we found ourselves, along with Bradshaw and Hall, enroute to Karlsruhe under the guard of one short, worried-looking Russian soldier. We arrived at Metz at dusk, and were pleased to see that some Allied bombs had found their mark here. With memory of the raid fresh in their minds, women openly scoffed at us and we were continually an exhibit "A" to passersby. After standing in

line for a weenie and saurkraut we slept in the railroad station and the following evening reached Karlsruhe.

"Here we were separated; you went to another room and I was thrust into a room suddenly and the door locked after me. In the dim light I saw three strangers in uniform. They were most hospitable and turned out to be an English Captain of Infantry, a Canadian flier and an American flier with the British. It seemed they had been cooped up in this room for a week or so and were waiting for some action. They kindly shared a bit of food with me and then the lights went out. The Canadian cleverly hung a blanket over the small painted windowpane and over the door, fumbled with the wires and secretly brought back our light.

"Meals here consisted of our usual mid-day bowl of cabbage water soup, a couple of slices of black bread, a cup of cereal (?), coffee (?), and the bitter tea, served by a Russian prisoner. Occasionally we were thrilled to hear the roar of Allied bombers passing overhead and an explosion or two told us the reprisal squadrons were working.

"At Landshut, Bavaria, next, the stable of an old castle situated on a hill was our prison camp, along with some twenty-five cellmates in one room. Food was better, and we had the freedom of a prison yard on pleasant days to stretch our legs in. We were amused by crap games, arguments, livestock, and 'Shonigans,' the earnest and enthusiastic efforts to eliminate the rodents. As a preventive toward future attempts to escape all shoes were collected every evening and distributed in the a.m.

"Food was the chief topic of conversation, and how to get more was the question."

Roger Chapin and Laddie Laird were released with nearly all of the U.S. aviation P.O.W.'s from the prison at Landshut and all returned to France via Switzerland in November 30th. Each P.O.W. was asked to give a report of his activities and experiences from the time he left his squadron until he was released from Germany. They were then re-assigned to their former squadrons or, if in need of medical treatment, to a base hospital.⁵

Roger Fiske Chapin was born in Boston in 1892, and died at Niantic, Conn., in August 1968. He enlisted in 1917 and went directly to Officer Training School at Plattsburg, New York, then to the Boston School of Technology for basic ground school. Flight training followed at Mineola, Long Island, and was commissioned 1st Lieutenant. He engaged in lengthy and extensive training at the 7th A.I.C. at Clermont-Ferrand until early June.

Claire B. "Laddie" Laird was from Algona, Iowa, born there in 1895, and attended the U.S. Naval Academy in 1915 and 1916. He said he "bilged out of the Academy," but enlisted in the Signal Corps in 1917 and was sent to the University of Texas at Austin for ground school. He went to France and was in the same class with Roger Chapin at Clermont-Ferrand.

After the war Roger Chapin engaged in the wholesale lumber business in Connecticut until his retirement. Claire Laird returned to Iowa and was senior vice president and sales manager when he retired after nearly fifty years with a heavy-duty machinery manufacturer; he still lives in Des Moines.⁶

It was later determined that the German unit which attacked the 11th Aero Sqdn flight was Jasta 12. The record of German victories for September 18th 1918 credit the Jasta 12 pilots: Lt. Becker with two e.a. shot down in flames; Lt. Besser with one plane shot down in flames; Lt. Grevin with one; and Lt. Wilke with one. Many years later, Larid was in contact with Lt. Alfred Grevin to exchange experiences. Grevin had lived for many years after the war in Koln, Germany, as a television show producer, and died there in February 1973.

What of the other men shot down on that tragic day of the St.



In P.O.W. camp the inevitable picture was made showing, seated left, Lt. Laird, and Lt. John A. King; in rear row are: Unknown RAF Lieutenant, Lt. George Wise, USAS, Lt. Chapin, Unknown, and Lt. William S. G. Kidder of RAF. (Photo from album of Claire B. Laird)

Mihel Offensive? Lt. John C. Tyler and Lt. Harry H. Strauch were both killed. Tyler completed his ground training at Boston Tech in August 1917, but remained a cadet for a long time, finally being commissioned in France, where he went through schools at Tours, Issoudon and Clermont-Ferrand. However, he too served with a French squadron from mid-June to late August, making an experienced team with Strauch. Both transferred to the 11th Aero in early September.

Lt. Edward T. Comegys received flight training in Canada, and went to England for further work, then to Clermont-Ferrand. He joined the 11th on the opening day of the Offensive, and in the raid of Sept. 18th he and Carter were shot down in flames, but Carter accounted for one of the enemy. Lt. Arthur R. Carter likewise attended Clermont-Ferrand.

Lts. Lester R. Harter and McCray Stephenson both reported to the 11th while it was at Delouze in late August, before the squadron moved to Amanty. In the battle of September 18th they fell and were buried at a small village outside of Conflans.

Lts. John E. Osmun and Phillip J. Edwards were turned back before getting to the target area. Both survived the war, Edwards living today in Lake Villa, Ill. Osmun died a number of years ago. Lts. Vincent P. Oatis and Ramon H. Guthrie, who fell out of the bottom of the cloud as they entered the target area, got back to their airfield about 6:00 on the evening of Sept. 18th, badly shaken and shot up by the intense ground fire. Guthrie lives today in Norwich, Vermont; Oatis died in 1958.

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