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THE
**GRAND
ESCAPE**

----- THE GREATEST PRISON BREAKOUT OF THE 20TH CENTURY -----

NEAL BASCOMB AUTHOR OF THE NAZI HUNTERS



THE GRAND



ARTHUR A. LEVINE BOOKS
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ESCAPE

THE GREATEST PRISON BREAKOUT OF THE 20TH CENTURY

ALSO BY NEAL BASCOMB

THE NAZI HUNTERS
SABOTAGE

PROLOGUE

HOLZMINDEN, 1918.

Twenty-seven-year-old Lieutenant Caspar Kennard was the number-one man, the digger, this afternoon. He wriggled through the eighteen-inch-diameter tunnel, a hundred feet from its entrance. In one hand he held a flickering candle, its light casting a devilish dance of shadows about him. With the other hand, he clawed at the dirt to drag himself forward. Roped to his leg was a shallow bin to bring out the excavated earth. Finally, after almost thirty minutes of crawling, he reached the end of the burrow. He scooped out a shelf in the mud wall, set down the candle, and briefly watched the flame struggle to survive in the oxygen-starved air. He took a breath, calmed himself best as he could, then started digging into the firm mix of stone and yellow clay.

Far behind him, at the mouth of the tunnel underneath a narrow paneled staircase, David Gray, the number-two man, muscled the bellows and pumped air down to Kennard. Behind Gray, the number-three man, Cecil Blain, waited to haul out the bin and pack the earth into the steadily shrinking space under

the stairs. Each shift they rotated the jobs. Nobody liked to be the digger.

Tunneling was a nasty business. Kennard barely had space to shift his body. The burrow reeked of stale air, mildew, sweat, and rot. There were rats, worms, and other creepy-crawlies, and never enough air to breathe. He was always banging his head against stones, and earth pressed on him in every direction, threatening to collapse and snuff out his life. Given his life-long fear of confined spaces, Kennard had to force himself not to panic.

Inch by inch, he carved out a small stretch of tunnel, then he contorted his body to fill the bin with dirt and rocks. There was months more of this mole work ahead, months more of digging what was either a very long tomb or a path to freedom from Holzminden, the notorious German prison camp in which they were all incarcerated. Once beyond the walls of this land-locked Alcatraz—if they made it that far—he and his fellow prisoners would have to make a 150-mile journey by foot through enemy territory to the border. The Germans would assuredly launch a manhunt, and they could face recapture—or a bullet—at any turn.

When not risking their own death tunneling underground, the men forged documents, smuggled in supplies, bribed guards for intelligence, and developed their cover stories for their flight to free Holland. To succeed would defy every odd against them.

CHAPTER 1

The sky lightened from gray to pink as the 70th Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) prepared to take off from their base. Already the din of shelling sounded in the distance. It was August 7, 1916, at Fienvillers, France, 20 miles from the Somme battlefront. “Contact, sir!” called the mechanic, his hand on the black walnut propeller of a Sopwith 1½ Strutter biplane. “Contact!” answered its pilot, Cecil Blain, from the open fore cockpit.

Blain pushed the throttle halfway, allowing fuel to rush into the nine-cylinder rotary engine. The mechanic jerked the propeller downward, counterclockwise. With a belch of blue smoke, the Sopwith sputtered to life. The rush of air from the spinning propeller flattened the airfield’s grass behind the tailplane. Seated in the aft cockpit behind Blain was Charles Griffiths, the observer, whose various tasks included radio communication, aerial reconnaissance, and manning the guns. Once they finished their flight checks, Blain waved his arm fore and aft, and the mechanic yanked out the wooden chocks securing the biplane’s wheels in place.

All of nineteen years of age, the youngest pilot in his squadron, Blain might well have stepped straight off a Hollywood silent movie screen—with his square shoulders, handsome boyish face, and sweep of blond hair. He sported a thick leather

jacket with fur-lined collar over a woolen pullover and two layers of underclothes. These were worn with heavy boots, gloves, and a white silk scarf. His face was slathered with whale oil and covered by a balaclava and goggles. He would need all that protection to withstand the cold at 10,000 feet.

After his squadron commander took off, Blain moved his Sopwith onto the runway. Following a quick look over his shoulder to check Griffiths was ready, Blain directed the Sopwith forward. Its red, white, and blue roundels struck in sharp relief against the mud-green fuselage. Throttle full open now, engine buzzing, the biplane picked up momentum. Blain fought against the crosswinds buffeting the wings and the inclination of the plane's nose to lift up too early. When they reached flying speed, he pulled back the stick, and the Sopwith's wheels lifted free from the ground.

Banking eastward, they soon left behind the bundle of ramshackle cottages and simple church that made up the village of Fienvillers. Once assembled in a V-shaped formation, the five Sopwiths set off eastward, the sky emblazoned bright orange ahead. Their mission was reconnaissance of Maubeuge, deep behind German enemy lines, to locate some munitions factories and investigate whether an airship base was housing Zeppelins.

For a moment, Blain and Griffiths enjoyed the thrill of soaring through the open air. The horizons stretched out in every direction. Mists clung to the low hollows of the hills, and chimney smoke rose from the surrounding villages. Compared to their maps—main roads clearly delineated in red, railways in black,



The young Cecil Blain's first RFC photo.

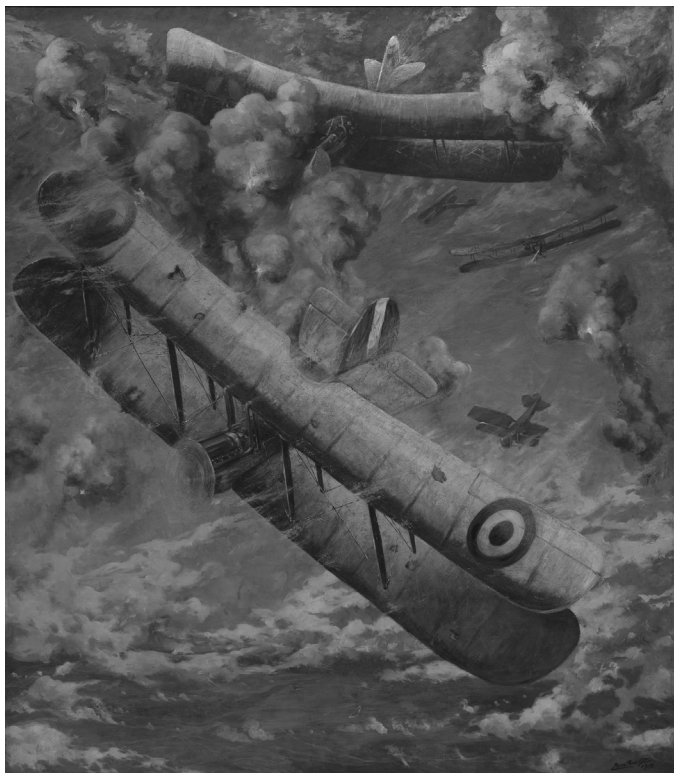
forests in green—the French countryside was an endless patchwork of colored fields threaded with gray lines and shadowed by clouds.

They approached the trenches of the Western Front, no mistaking their position. One airman described the sight: “Open for us to inspect were all the secrets of this waste of tortured soil, a barrier along which millions of armed men crouched in foul trenches . . . Below us lay displayed the zigzagging entrenchments, the wriggling communications to the rear, the untidy belts of rusty wire.” Few accounts told of the innumerable dead rotting in no-man’s-land, but they would have been visible to the pilots who passed overhead.

On July 1, 1916, shortly after Blain arrived in France, seventeen Allied divisions had begun a massive offensive to break through German lines on the upper reaches of the river Somme. At “Zero Hour,” 7:30 a.m., to the sound of whistles blowing, lines of khaki-clad British soldiers and their blue-gray uniformed French counterparts rose from their trenches and attacked the Germans through no-man’s-land, under the withering chatter of machine-gun fire. On the offensive’s first day the Allies took but a “bite” out of the enemy’s ruined line—at the cost of almost 20,000 British dead and double this figure in wounded: the greatest loss of life in a single day in the country’s military history. In the weeks that followed, wave after wave of attack and counterattack resettled the lines, largely to where they had started.

As the five Sopwiths traveled across no-man’s-land, suddenly the sky went thick with coughs of black smoke. *Archie!*

Nicknamed by pilots after a popular London music-hall song—whose refrain went, “*Archibald!* Certainly not!”—these shells delivered death in many ways. A direct hit would crumple a plane in an instant, sending it in a precipitous drop from the sky, like a bird downed by a shotgun. Simply being near the explosion could hurl a plane into an irrecoverable spiral. And Archie shells could kill entire aircrews with a 360-degree spray of shrapnel that tore through flesh and the fragile structures that kept the planes aloft.



A British and German dogfight. The British plane is in the foreground, with a German plane on its tail and three other planes visible in the distance.

A shell rocked one plane on the port side of their formation, but its pilot recovered. Another cut confetti-sized slits into the wings of Blain's plane, and shrapnel pinged against his engine cowling. The *wouft-wouft-wouft* of Archies pounding in his ears, Blain inspected his controls. Everything looked okay. He glanced back at Griffiths, and they shared a thumbs-up. As quickly as the barrage began, it ended. They flew on toward Maubeuge to continue their reconnaissance. Now that they were beyond enemy lines, Blain knew that fighter planes were likely to attack, and there was little cloud cover in which to hide. Griffiths readied at his mounted Lewis machine gun, and they both searched the sky.

Sixty miles behind enemy lines, they sighted the glint of sun off the river Sambre and reached Maubeuge. The ancient city had been besieged and sacked many times over the centuries, handed between French, Spanish, and Austrian dukes and counts almost too many times to count. But it had never suffered the kind of heavy artillery bombardment unleashed by the Germans. Its fortress walls were spilled piles of rubble. The planes broke away from the formation to begin their reconnaissance. Cutting across the city, Blain and Griffiths looked for the airship base marked on their maps. They passed the train station, puffs of steam from a departing locomotive rising into the air.

The mammoth gray sheds were easy to spot. On his first pass, Blain didn't see anything, but the Zeppelins could well be inside. He banked around and descended low for a second look, easing back on the throttle. In that moment, a spout of blue flame

burst from the engine. One of the intake valves might be jammed. Blain increased throttle again. More flames flashed out. As he tried to regain some altitude, the engine's rhythmic, continuous drone became an irregular stutter, and the plane began to vibrate. A glance at the revolutions-per-minute counter confirmed his fear: engine trouble. The best he could hope for now was to get his plane out of enemy-occupied territory. There was a chance.

He turned westward, pushing to maintain altitude. Any attempt to alter the carburetor mix or to clear the stuck valve failed. The acrid stench of hot metal soon overwhelmed, and the Sopwith bobbed slightly up and down in the airstream as it slowed. Blain continued to woo some effort from the engine, mile after precious mile. Then, with a frightening shriek, a piece of metal ripped through the engine cowling and flung off into the air behind them. Flames flared from the broken intake valve, and the propeller stopped dead. They were going down. The best he could do now was get himself and Griffiths on the ground alive.

When Orville Wright performed the first flight in a powered airplane on December 17, 1903, he declared it to be “the introduction into the world of an invention which would make further wars practically impossible.” Wright was correct that airplanes would bring a revolution in war, but not in the way he imagined. Instead of an instrument for peace, the airplane became a multipronged weapon in a conflict that would envelope the world. The RFC was founded in April 1912 and was the forerunner to the British

Royal Air Force (RAF). They entered the war a fledgling force staffed mostly by enterprising, well-heeled amateurs. The aircraft they brought to France were made from wood, wire, and canvas; had only 70-horsepower engines; sped barely over 75 miles per hour; and took almost an hour to climb to their ceiling height of 10,000 feet. Pilots carried rifles for weapons and grenades for bombs. Soon after fighting began, however, many credited the RFC's bird's-eye role tracking troop movements with staving off the German envelopment of British troops and an early knockout blow in the war. A dispatch to London from the field commander praised the RFC's "skill, energy and perseverance."

In his pilots, Hugh Trenchard, the RFC commander in France, looked for "High spirits and resilience of youth . . . under twenty-five, and unmarried. Athletic, alert, cheerful, even happy-go-lucky, the paragon would also reveal initiative and a sense of humour. The greatest strength was an incurable optimism." Blain fit the bill.

The eldest son of a wealthy English cotton merchant, Cecil William Blain was born in 1896. As a schoolboy, he attended Loretto, a Scottish boarding school that had churned out its share of famous bankers, politicians, judges, and clergymen. The school was known for sport, and Cecil excelled at cricket, rugby, and golf. On graduation, he went to South Africa, where his uncle owned a large ranch and pineapple farm. There he tended fields, rode horses, and spent his days in the sun. The outbreak of war ended this free-spirited life. Blain felt compelled to return to



A recruiting poster to fly for Britain.

fight for his country. With his connections to the British elite, he easily secured a spot in the RFC. Its glamor and gallant reputation made it an attractive service for most young men.

He did his flight training at Northolt, London, where the instructors were mostly RFC airmen on leave from the front, some of them washed out from trauma. Crashes were frequent, often deadly. On a typical day of training, a cadet might witness a dozen. Sometimes the wreckage was so grisly the ambulance did not have to hurry. Planes pancaked on rough landings or overshot the runway altogether, smashing into trees. They over-turned in the air and spiraled out of control. There were midair

collisions. Engines died. Petrol ran out. Wings became untethered. Rudders stuck. Of the roughly 9,000 men who died in the RFC over the course of the war, one in four were killed in training. Blain survived, and on January 14, 1916, he was issued his wings. That June, he was assigned to the newly formed 70th Squadron, responsible for long-range patrols in enemy territory. He left for France in time for the launch of the Somme offensive.

There was nothing for Blain and Griffiths to do but land. They sailed over a French village, low enough to see its inhabitants looking up at them with incredulous faces. Blain spied a level pasture, dotted with cows, and set the plane down gently. Its wheels rumbled to a stop in the high grass, and they scrambled out. Perhaps if they were able to fix the engine they could get back up in the air. One look at the shredded crankcase dashed their hopes.

Orders were that if they should come down behind enemy lines they were to destroy their machine so the Germans could neither use it nor learn from it. In this new battlefield in the sky, every advantage in developing technology might prove the difference between defeat or victory. The two men set upon their wooden craft, putting their fists and boots through the canvas wings. Griffiths opened the fuel tank and soaked a cloth with petrol. He circled the plane, smearing petrol across the wings, then set it on fire. Flames ran across the fuselage and wings just as German soldiers appeared, weapons drawn.

The Germans brought the two men to the nearby town of Cambrai and put them in a sliver of a cell in the old stone fortress. First they noticed the stifling heat, then the foul smell. When they tried to sleep, on two straw mattresses that filled the tiny space, they found their threadbare, soiled blankets were alive with lice. In the morning, a guard brought them some square hunks of sour black bread, their first food in twenty-four hours. Lunch and dinner were a cabbage soup that looked like filthy bathwater. It was served in slop pails.

They were let out of their cell briefly and found the prison crowded with Allied soldiers and plagued by dysentery. A wounded soldier lay on a stone floor, his upper arm a fetid gob of open flesh, dried blood, dirt, and straw. Nobody was allowed to help him. Night after night Blain lay on his mattress, too troubled to sleep. Escape crept around the edges of his thoughts, but the shock over his capture overwhelmed him.

CHAPTER 2

“There is to be a big push shortly . . . Every atom of energy must be concentrated on the task.” General Hugh “Boom” Trenchard spoke in the thunderous voice—and hard-charging attitude—that had earned him his nickname. “Our bombers should make life a burden on the enemy lines . . . Reconnaissance jobs must be completed at all costs.” At Le Hameau aerodrome in northern France, Captain David Gray accepted these orders with his usual aplomb. A flight leader in the 11th Squadron—home of several of the RFC’s finest aces—aggression in the sky was his specialty. Trimly built, with an erect posture and a neatly pressed uniform, Gray looked military, every inch. His stern glance, accentuated by a ruler-straight part in his hair, high forehead, trim mustache, and hatchet nose, marked an officer who brooked no compromise with himself, or his command.

On September 15, 1916, after heavy artillery bombardment of the German lines that one pilot likened to a “solid grey wool carpet of shell bursts,” British soldiers rose from their trenches in another major offensive on the Somme. Aided by tanks that cleared a path and provided gunfire cover, the troops overran a 9,000-yard stretch of the German trenches. Gray, his observer Leonard Helder, and scores of other RFC aircrews flew day and night, both before and after the initial ground attack. Beyond the



David Gray in RFC uniform.

threat of Archie and the risk of mechanical failure, they also faced attacks from German fighter squadrons. The RFC was increasingly being seen as a “suicide club,” and a pilot who lasted a few weeks on the front was considered an “absolute master.” Air crews were not issued with parachutes, and when they prepared emergency kits, with rations, maps, and other gear to allow them to survive if shot down, their commanders castigated them for showing an unwillingness to fight to the bitter end.

What the crews and the British command did not yet know was that Oswald Böelcke, the fearsome German ace, was back on the Western Front. An aggressive, practiced pilot, the twenty-five-year-old Böelcke was also a keen tactical thinker. The German air force had sent him to the east for the summer, but in late August, with the RFC again holding supremacy in the sky, they ordered him back to turn the tide. Böelcke started a new squadron, the *Jagdstaffel*, whose sole purpose was to hunt British planes. He recruited the best pilots, including the young Baron Manfred von Richthofen, soon to be known as the Red Baron. Böelcke demanded that his squadron be fully supplied with the new Albatros D.III, a fast, easily handled biplane with two fixed guns. With its tactic of coordinated assault, the *Jagdstaffel* was a vicious force.

At their aerodromes in France, Allied pilots chronicled the rising threat in flight logs, diaries, and letters home. Mostly they tried to relax between missions. They went on walks, rode horses, drank French port, played bridge, listened to music on the gramophone, and sang songs. There was comfort in the farmhouses and châteaux where they were billeted, and they tried to

forget the *wouft-wouft* of anti-artillery and the sight of friends plummeting in corkscrews to the earth, their planes on fire or split into two.

Gray reviewed his mission for September 17, 1916, pinned to the squadron noticeboard: Lead a six-plane fighter escort on a bombing run to the Marcoing rail junction to disrupt the German resupply of men and ammunition at the Somme. He suited up in preparation for the attack ahead. At 30 years of age, he was the “Old Man” in the 11th. Few, if any, had his military experience, including action under fire. His fighters, and the bomber crews they were protecting, would need every bit of it.

Gray had spent the first part of his childhood living in a tea plantation hewn out of the dense Indian jungles of upper Assam. It was a beautiful and perilous place—a land of misted rivers and dense canopies of palm trees, and also of insufferable heat, monsoons, malaria, cobras, and leopards that preyed in the dark. When he was almost eight, his family returned to England. His father opened a medical practice in London, and they lived in a townhouse in the well-heeled neighborhood of Regent’s Park. The culture shock was profound, but David adapted quickly.

He settled early on an army career and attended the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich, southeast London. Founded by King George II and known as “The Shop,” the academy’s students were destined to be sappers—engineers who built roads and bridges and laid and cleared mines—or in the artillery. A shrill trumpet called reveille at 6:15 a.m. Then, after a parade,

cadets attended lectures in the ivy-clad redbrick buildings, on everything from history and mathematics to electricity, fortifications, and explosives. They built wooden mountings for 80-ton artillery guns and soldered shell casings. They surveyed hills and dug long tunnels across the campus grounds with pick-axes and shovels.

Upon graduation, Gray was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Royal Garrison Artillery and stationed in a fort on the Red Sea. Two years later, wishing to return to the country of his birth, he joined the 48th Pioneers of the British Indian Army. Although an infantry regiment, the Pioneers specialized in constructing bridges, fortifications, and roads in the often impassable Indian landscape. Gray was well liked both by his soldiers and by the officers above him, and he was promoted to lieutenant. His record read: "A capable and efficient officer. Good eye for country. Has tact and judgment. Energetic and self-reliant." Positions as quartermaster and adjutant followed, then a promotion to captain.

Gray also sank himself into the cultures in which he lived. Languages came to him as easily as bad habits did to others, and his nickname in India was "Munshi," teacher of tongues. Besides English, he spoke French, German, Russian, Bengali, Hindi, and Arabic, as well as a healthy smattering of several other languages.

Soon after the outbreak of World War I, the 48th Pioneers embarked from Bombay (modern-day Mumbai) with the 6th (Poona) Division of the British Indian Army. Their transport

steamed up the Persian Gulf and anchored at the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab, the river created from the confluence of the Tigris and the Euphrates. The British needed to ensure a steady supply of oil from Mesopotamia for the war effort. For that, they had to maintain dominance in the region, first by wresting control of Basra from the Turks. Within days of the Pioneers' arrival, Gray led a machine-gun company in a fierce fight to take Kut-az-Zain, a fort manned by 4,500 Turks. Gray thrived in his first test of combat. The division then force-marched 30 miles across the desert to take Basra from the fleeing enemy.

In spring 1915, Allied biplanes of the newly founded Indian Royal Flying Corps soared over Basra, scouting Turkish movements in the deserts to the north. The sight inspired Gray. Here were masters of the air, flying engineered marvels able to evade or engage the enemy on their own terms. Later that year, Gray returned to London to claim a spot in the RFC flight school at Hendon. He was schooled in dogfighting by Albert Ball, Britain's most famous ace. After earning his wings in January 1916, he distinguished himself flying for a Home Defense squadron, then another in France, before the elite 11th recruited him to their fighter ranks. Soon after he became a flight leader, known in the squadron for his preternatural calm.

After a dismal breakfast in the mess hall, Gray and Helder took off in their trusted Farman Experimental FE2b. Helder was an experienced observer, and he and Gray made a fine team. Their British-built two-seater, with its V-shaped structure, stab of a

tail wing, and 160 horsepower engine, had served them well on numerous missions. It carried colored streamers on the tail wing to mark it as the escort leader. Minutes after clearing the aerodrome, the engine started to knock, and Gray signaled the five other escorts to return. Ground crews prepared another FE, this one new, fresh off the factory line.

To the RFC, though, “new” meant untested and prone to fault. Gray ascended into the air again, this time without much confidence in his machine, but because of a low fog the run was postponed again, and they returned to base. At 9:30 a.m., he left Le Hameau for the third time. His friend Lionel Morris, with whom he had learned to fly, was second lead. The sky was now clear and bright. Gray and Helder circled at 10,000 feet, waiting for the arrival of the bombers. They could see the white cliffs of Dover in the distance, on the other side of the English Channel. Although it was wonderful to see their homeland, the clear skies guaranteed attack from German fighters—and the lack of clouds meant there would be no place to hide.

Helder sighted the dozen bombers from the 16th Squadron to the north: slow but sturdy BE2cs carrying 20-pound and 112-pound “eggs” under their carriages. Gray wagged his wings, indicating to the other escort pilots to tighten into a diamond formation. A red flare from the lead bomber signaled the mission was a go. With Marcoing only 35 miles away, the journey would be short. Before crossing the front, Helder fired his Lewis gun to warm up its action. No sooner had their ears stopped ringing from their own gunfire than bursts of Archie surrounded them.



An FE2B bomber and reconnaissance plane in the air during a run.

All the planes sailed unharmed through the barrage. Perhaps fortune was shining on them and the run would come off without interference. Shortly after, they spotted the sun's reflection shining from the railway track that ran to Marcoing.

The bombers were below them, at 6,000 feet, and they now zeroed in on the railway junction. Gray maintained his escort's position above, where they could prevent any diving attacks from the enemy. All his crews kept a sharp eye out. The eggs dropped one after another over Marcoing. Explosions rocked the air and sent up mushroom clouds of black smoke. Job well done

by all, the 16th turned back toward the west. Gray and the other escorts turned to follow the bombers home.

Suddenly, the sky was alive with black-crossed planes swooping in from the blind of the sun. “Fritz!” Helder screamed through the rush of air. Böelcke and his Jagdstaffel drove home their surprise attack. One British bomber was ripped to pieces. Gray banked, then dove to protect the others. Watching the German planes for any change in their direction, he gauged his angle of descent to maximize his plane’s arc of fire. Knees braced against the sides of the cockpit, Helder stood on his seat to better direct the Lewis gun. Its bullets cut through the air. An Albatros exploded into a ball of flame. Gray’s and Helder’s quick and courageous actions gave the rest of the bombers the seconds they needed to escape to the west.

The scarlet-and-black planes cartwheeled around to focus on the six escort fighters. They swarmed the British with the bewildering force and speed that would earn them their sobriquet “The Flying Circus.” A close-quarter rake of bullets from Böelcke ripped through Gray’s engine and shredded an aileron. Propeller stopped, balance control lost, the plane plummeted into a spin. Helder hung on to a strut to avoid being flung out. Böelcke hounded them as Gray tried to recover. Bullets punctured the petrol tank and shredded a wing. Then the German swung away to single out another fighter. The others in the Jagdstaffel swerved and sideslipped through the air in an elegant but deadly pursuit. One of them, Richthofen, aiming for his first



A dogfight on the Western front. A British plane flies toward a falling German plane, trailing smoke on the right.

victory, chased after Morris, the second lead of the British squadron.

Ground approaching, the world a dizzying swirl of sky and black smoke, Gray fought to recover from the spin. Nothing worked. The altimeter quickly spun downward: 4,000 feet . . . 3,000 . . . 2,000. Gray wrenched the stick back and forth and pressed on the foot controls to adjust the rudder. They spiraled toward the ground as petrol sprayed from the punctured tank. 1,000 feet . . . 500 feet . . . With a sudden calm, the plane stopped its corkscrew, and they leveled out. Gray tried to restart the engine, but it was shot dead. Moments later, he crash-landed into

a field crowded with German infantry and a reconnaissance balloon. His face lacerated with cuts, his arm broken, he crawled out of the plane. Helder also survived the crash. Quickly, a match was struck and touched to the wreckage. Already soaked with petrol, it burst up in flames.

Soldiers encircled the British airmen, a safe distance from the blaze. A gray-haired officer approached, his Luger pistol pointed at their heads. "You are my prisoners, gentlemen," he said, in clipped English. Gray and Helder raised their arms as their plane dissembled behind them. At that moment, overhead, Richthofen put one last burst of bullets into the plane flown by Morris. It fell sideways and crashed behind some trees, 500 yards from where Gray and Helder stood. They could do nothing. Their German captor stood there, his pistol trained on them, as if confused about what to do next. "Mind if we put our hands down?" Gray asked, too much in pain, too distressed over seeing his friend go down that he did not much care about the danger his words might put him in.

Gray was quiet for the short ride to Cambrai. For a man like him, capture was a black mark of shame akin to desertion or a self-inflicted wound. He had no choice except to surrender, but that did not lessen the blow. At Cambrai, a medic set his broken arm, then soldiers hustled him and Helder through the stone fortress, down a narrow, dark stairwell to the cellars—just as they had done with Blain six weeks prior, before he was sent to the camp at Gütersloh. "The war is over for you," one said in English. Other soldiers spoke to them in German, but not once did Gray

reveal that he understood them. He knew that his fluency would be an advantage only if it remained hidden. The soldiers put them into a large cell with double-tier wooden bunks. It was already occupied by several crews from the Marcoing run and also, to their great relief, two 11th Squadron officers who had not returned from their mission the day before. At least they were alive.

The following morning, waking up on a straw mattress, Gray found lice inside his shirt. Such a fastidious man, the discovery disgusted him. Later, several Jagdstaffel officers visited the British crews to gloat. Their blue-gray dress uniforms were a stark contrast to the British airmen's soiled, bloodied outfits, darkening the mood in the cell further. This was nothing compared to their despair when more RFC crews arrived, having been shot down by the Jagdstaffel.

On September 26, Gray and the others were marched out of Cambrai and boarded onto a third-class train carriage. They stopped in Douai, Valenciennes, Brussels, and Liège on their way to Germany. The battered ruins afforded them a close look at the effects of war. Everything was shrouded in a veil of gloom, the streets crowded with pale-faced widows dressed in black. At Aachen, they knew they were across the German border at last. In Cologne, they were allowed to disembark, and they sat for hours in an underground waiting room while German civilians eyed them like a horrible disease.

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