

CAVALRY OF THE CLOUDS

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Cavalry of the clouds by Alan Bott

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ALAN BOTT

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BY
"CONTACT"
(CAPT. ALAN BOTT, M.C.)

With an introduction by
MAJOR-GENERAL W. S. BRANCKER
(Deputy Director-General of
Military Aeronautics)



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W. WIND
AND WILCO

DEDICATED
TO
THE FALLEN OF UMPY SQUADRON, R.F.C.
JUNE-DECEMBER 1916

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PREFACE

OF the part played by machines of war in this war of machinery the wider public has but a vague knowledge. Least of all does it study the specialised functions of army aircraft. Very many people show mild interest in the daily reports of so many German aeroplanes destroyed, so many driven down, so many of ours missing, and enraged interest in the reports of bomb raids on British towns; but of aerial observation, the main *raison d'être* of flying at the front, they own to nebulous ideas.

As an extreme case of this haziness over matters aeronautic I will quote the lay question, asked often and in all seriousness: "Can an aeroplane stand still in the air?" Another surprising point of view is illustrated by the home-on-leave experience of a pilot belonging to my present squadron. His lunch companion—a charming lady—said she

supposed he lived mostly on cold food while in France.

"Oh no," replied the pilot, "it's much the same as yours, only plainer and tougher."

"Then you do come down for meals," deduced the lady. Only those who have flown on active service can fully relish the comic savour of a surmise that the Flying Corps in France remain in the air all day amid all weathers, presumably picnicking, between flights, off sandwiches, cold chicken, pork pies, and mineral waters.

These be far-fetched examples, but they serve to emphasise a general misconception of the conditions under which the flying services carry out their work at the big war. I hope that this my book, written for the most part at odd moments during a few months of training in England, will suggest to civilian readers a rough impression of such conditions. To Flying Officers who honour me by comparing the descriptions with their own experiences, I offer apology for whatever they may regard as "hot air," while submitting in excuse that the narratives are founded on unexaggerated fact, as any one

who served with Umpty Squadron through the Battle of the Somme can bear witness.

I have expressed a hope that the chapters and letters will suggest a rough impression of work done by R.F.C. pilots and observers in France. A complete impression they could not suggest, any more than the work of a Brigade-Major could be regarded as representative of that of the General Staff. The Flying-Corps-in-the-Field is an organisation great in numbers and varied in functions. Many separate duties are allotted to it, and each separate squadron, according to its type of machine, confines itself to two or three of these tasks.

The book, then, deals only with the squadron to which I belonged last year, and it does not pretend to be descriptive of the Flying Corps as a whole. Ours was a crack squadron in its day, and, as General Brancker has mentioned in his Introduction, it held a melancholy record in the number of its losses. Umpty's Squadron's casualties during August, September, and October of 1916 still constitute a record for the casualties of any one flying squadron during any three months