

# ACE CARROWAY

AND THE GREAT WAR

GUY WORTHEY



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NOTE: This electronic preview does not contain the full novella.



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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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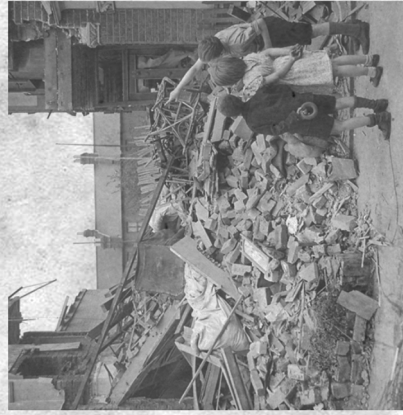
## AIR RAIDS INTENSIFY

**More powerful bombs fall on London.**

Three neighbourhoods were damaged in Thursday's air raids, entirely demolishing at least three buildings. Five civilians are known to have perished, and 17 others were injured. R.A.F. spokesman B. J. Littleton said the bombs were dropped from "heavy aircraft" and speculated that the planes originated from "captured areas of Belgium." Mr. Littleton did not respond to questions about whether the R.A.F. French fleet should be brought home to protect

**Bomb shelters overcrowded.** Even the newly constructed bunkers were overrun during the raid, causing considerable distress amongst those seeking shelter. Part of this may be due to the completion of the air raid siren array, according to construction engineer H. Thorpe Norris. He speculates that more people were aware of the raid, and sought shelter.

**Roads cleared. Fires smoulder.** Civil authorities urge due



**Soissons Lost.** Bad news from France did little to lighten the mood. The P.M. confirmed yesterday's reports that Ottoman forces swept through Allied forces in and near Soissons, France. The loss brings more territory under Ottoman control, including farms, several factories and a key airstrip. British Army spokesman Maj. G. Collins, however, was upbeat. "There are bound to be hiccups," he said, "but soon we'll have the American Expeditionary smoothly integrated with the British Regulars."

## CHAPTER I

Incoming bullets chipped wood and frayed fabric in the wings and body of the SPAD biplane in a muted pitter-patter of death. The Allied pilot barrel-rolled the biplane left. But it was a feint. The SPAD peeled out of the roll, rose sharply up, and looped backwards and upside down.

The enemy pilot cursed when he realized he had not hit anything vital. He cursed again when his quarry soared above him. He tried to follow, but the airspeed of his Eindecker monoplane dropped. He almost stalled. For a few seconds, he slowly tipped over into a dive, knowing he was easy prey for the SPAD. He expected bullets to fly and end it. The SPAD passed by, its engine buzzing loud in the cold air. No bullets flew, but something heavy struck the edge of his cockpit and clattered downwards into the pedals.

He glanced incredulously at the SPAD. The Allied pilot, in leather cap and goggles, gave him a two-fingered salute. The momentary eye contact contained no hatred, only solemn respect focused by the iron clench of a resolute jaw. And she was a woman! The enemy pilot's eyes followed the biplane as it banked away into the sunset.

He shook off his stupor and looked down to his feet. Between the rudder pedals lay the tubular shape of an Allied grenade! He frantically reached for it, but it was too late. The next second, his plane was a fire-

ball.

The Allied fighter roared home. It was a French-built SPAD<sup>1</sup>, a wood frame covered in glue-soaked fabric. An aileron cable had been cut by a bullet. The pilot compensated for the broken aileron with the elevators and landed with deceptive ease. The ground crew ran to meet the plane as it rolled toward the hangar. The pilot killed its engine. The crew threw chocks under the wheels and rolled a ladder to bump against the cockpit. The pilot leapt out and down into a ring of handshaking and back-slapping.

“Ace!” the grease monkeys clamored.

“Did you get another kill?”

“How many is that now? Eight? Nine?”

“However many it is, you fellas deserve at least half the credit. When I needed some altitude, that Orkney engine sure delivered!” Ace peeled her flyer’s goggles and hat off, revealing gold-flecked eyes and short-cropped gold-colored hair.

A pilot wedged in among the British and French mechanics clustered around Ace. The pilot seized Ace’s hand and pumped it in both of his, muttering, “Thank you! Thank you!”

Ace was patient with it for a little while, but she disengaged and pounded the man on his leather jacket shoulder. “No big deal, Maxwell! It’s why we fly in pairs. Gotta go. Time to debrief.” Ace jogged off to report to the field commander.

All eyes watched her leave, becoming pensive over time.

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<sup>1</sup> Biplanes built by the Société Pour L’Aviation et ses Dérivés (S.P.A.D.).

“Wot’s wif you?” A British mechanic nudged the pilot.

Maxwell said thickly, “She saved my life up there.”

“Ha!” barked a Frenchman, “You ’ave a debt of gratitude now, *mon ami*. ’Ow an’ when will you pay it back?”

“Wot’f somethin’ ’appens to ’er?” wondered the Brit.

That earned the fellow a cuff on the back of the head. “*Tais-toi!* Quiet, man! Get to working. *Tu me fatigues!*”



Ace pushed open the door.

Wing Commander Joyce Harcourt glanced up and commented drily in Oxford accents, “I thought it might be you. Market shares in breath mints rose sharply today.”

“There’s a career in vaudeville waiting for you after the war, Commander.”

“I doubt that, Ace. Listen, congratulations. Your whole wing made it back today. The reconnaissance flight over Verviers, however, wasn’t so lucky. I’m afraid Jean-Louis and Bildsten didn’t return.”

“They got shot down? Weren’t they flying at the ceiling?”

Harcourt nodded. “Just so. Flying so high they should have been safe for at least one pass. It takes a long time for enemy planes to scramble and get up to altitude. By then, the recon planes should be halfway

home.”

“Bildsten. What a flyer. I can’t believe they downed Bildsten.”

“It isn’t only Jean-Louis and Bildsten. We lost Ableton over Verviers last week.”

Ace mused, “The Ottomans must have planes in the sky all the time, then. To prevent spying.”

The Ottoman Empire was the enemy. The Great War began when Germany secretly joined the Empire. Almost three years of bloody conflict later, the Ottomans held Belgium, Luxembourg, and large portions of France.

Harcourt said, “Yes, and that’s quite a waste of resources. There must be something deucedly important there, or the Ottomans wouldn’t be protecting it like the crown jewels.”

“You want me to help out, Commander?”

“Yes, I’m assigning a whole wing to Verviers reconnaissance.”

“Six planes? That’s almost a quarter of the Ghost Squadron!<sup>2</sup> But the more we figure out, the quicker this war will be over,” Ace replied quietly.

“Indeed. You will lead the wing.”

“Me?” Ace looked evasively left and right. “But I’m just a kid.”

“I know. And a girl kid at that. But you can’t duck it. Not with your list of kills! It’s happening already. The other pilots look to you when they need a compass bearing.”

Ace stood quietly, mulling over the alien landscape

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<sup>2</sup> The “Ghost Squadron” was known formally as the Royal Air Force Guest Squadron, composed of pilots and planes orphaned from other Allied military air forces, including the American Expeditionary.

of leadership.

Commander Harcourt let her stew, looking for signs of panic in the young, serious face. Seeing none, she said, "Captain—"

Ace groaned. "I've been Captain for what, three days?"

"Yes, the awful price of becoming an ace pilot. Speaking of that, how many kills today, Captain?"

"Two," Ace replied.

"Two! I'll just write that down. Dismissed." Harcourt gave a sketch of a salute.

Ace saluted back. "My machine gun jammed after the first, though."

Commander Harcourt narrowed her eyes at Ace. "How did you get a second kill without a machine gun?"

"I winked at him," Ace said, reaching for the door knob.

The tall, golden pilot left.

Looking at the closed door, Commander Harcourt muttered, "I halfway believe her!"



Ace closed the door on the noise of the officers' mess, still chewing a mouthful of stale biscuit. She fled toward the hangars.

Two mechanics were working on her SPAD. One sliced off bullet-damaged skin. The other patched with fabric and dope. When the glue-soaked fabric dried, it would be stiff and airtight, but not bulletproof. In the

quiet, a sullen east wind brought muted thunder from artillery at the front.

*“Bonsoir, Ace!”*

Ace frowned. “Finished with the aileron already? Rats. I was going to help.”

“So sad! You are too slow! Go find Tripod. ‘E salvage some parts over there.” The mechanic pointed with his knife toward the back corner of the hangar.

“Oh! Thanks!” Ace jogged over to a pool of electric light under which was the front end of a broken-backed SPAD. A wiry figure hunched over the dented radial engine. His wrench hand was missing its pinkie and ring fingers.

Tripod glanced at Ace and gestured with his head to a tool box. With a silent smile, Ace joined the disassembly. They laid out spark plugs, poppet valves, and pushrods, sorting out good parts from damaged parts.

Over a happy hour, a satisfying fatigue stole over the warm muscles of arms and shoulders. Ace took a break to stretch. She asked, “What’s your name?”

“Taha Hakim Tali.” Tripod’s teeth gleamed white in his dark face. “Tripod is easier. I don’t mind. Tap that piston. Do you think the metal is fatigued?”

Ace struck the gleaming cylinder with her wrench, listening to its ting. She nodded. “Yes. The steel is getting brittle. It’s trash. Where are you from? You’re the only one here with skin darker than mine.”

*“Algeria.”*

“Oh, I’m sorry. It’s as rough in Algeria as it is in France.”

“My town is invaded now,” Tripod said. “I hope my mother and sister are all right.”

*“My dad’s safe in America.”*

“You are American?”

“Indian-American. My mother was Indian, but she died when I was small. My father raised me.”

“Your father is a mechanic?”

Ace laughed softly. “No, he builds ships. But he made sure I was educated.” She smiled ruefully. “Well-educated. *Really* well-educated.”

Tripod’s eyes narrowed. “Such a scholar? Maybe you belong with the officers, not here in the grease.”

“No!”

Tripod chuckled. “Why do you say no? Do the men chase you?”

“Not often.”

“*Mais oui*. You have a certain look you make. A stare that is like ice water.”

“What? No, I meant that I’m not good-looking.”

Tripod was unconvinced. “So why do you come here, and not stay with the officers?”

“I get impatient. I can’t stand being idle. I don’t talk just for the sake of talking.”

“Well, you belong somewhere.”

Ace muttered, “Maybe. Maybe not. I do fine on my own. I’ve got to go. I’ve got to make sure they un-jammed my machine gun.”



Harcourt kept the RAF<sup>3</sup> couriers busy. She sent in a letter recommending Cecilia “Ace” Carroway for dou-

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<sup>3</sup> Royal Air Force

ble ace status, the first pilot in the Ghost Squadron to down ten planes. She also sent two letters that began “It is with heartfelt sympathy and deep regret ...” for Jean-Louis’s and Bildsten’s next of kin. Finally, Commander Harcourt sent six pilots off to die.

Potentially, anyway. Although she maintained a properly British stoic exterior, wartime decisions made Harcourt queasy. But she knew there was something near Verviers, Belgium that the Ottomans did not want seen.

Knotted stomach or not, Harcourt scribbled the order for six planes to reconnoiter Verviers. It was a lot to throw at one recon mission, but Harcourt had a hunch it might be worth it. If the planes came back. If the planes did not come back, she would have to write more letters of condolence.

And so, shortly after dawn, six biplanes lifted into the skies over France and flew into the rising sun.

## CHAPTER 2

Ace relaxed en route to Verviers, jawing on some double mint chewing gum. The frigid high-altitude air pinched at her nose and burrowed into a loose seam on her glove, turning her index finger into an icicle. “I love flying,” Ace remarked. She sat on her hand to warm her finger up and scanned the landscape as they overflew the front lines. The bomb craters and churned turf contrasted with the colorful onset of autumn in field and forest. A few puffs of smoke erupted from Ottoman-held ground. Moments later, explosive blooms flowered in mid-air, but far below Ace’s position. Ace’s gum-chewing continued, tempo unaltered. “They’re wasting shells. We’re too high.”

The gunners gave up. The wing flew over the former France-Belgium border, now many miles into Ottoman-held territory. Ace patted her instrument panel affectionately. Ace’s biplane was a month old but already battered and patched from the action it had seen. Many pilots complained that the SPAD controls were sluggish and heavy, but Ace applied her analytical mind. She tested the biplane’s responses until she could loop tight, roll dizzily, and pull out of vertical power dives.

Ace looked left and right. She was like the lead goose in a “V” formation. Maxwell flew on her left wing. Ace motioned the “eyes peeled” gesture and got

thumbs-up yesses in return.

Maxwell saw them first: two dark dots against the bright morning sky, but well above them, not below. Maxwell stabbed his finger at the spot, and all eyes along the ragged row of aircraft were riveted on the dots. The pilots exchanged worried looks. How could planes fly so high? As the distance between the wing and the two Ottoman planes closed, it became clear. These planes were a new design. They were similar in body to the Eindecker but bigger, with two engines, not one. Two engines meant more power, and that translated to a higher altitude ceiling.

Ace furrowed her brow in worry, then motioned for her wing to spread out. They were about to be dived on and strafed, and there wasn't a thing anybody could do to prevent it.

All the airplanes stayed on the same course for an eerie minute as the distance closed. And then everything started to happen at once. The two strange Ottoman planes dived. The Allied planes dodged like drunk hummingbirds. Orange muzzle flares flashed angrily. Ace drew the fire of one, and Maxwell the other. Ace banked hard. Bullet impacts vibrated through the frame of the SPAD. She nosed into a spiraling dive, chasing where she thought the Ottoman had gone.

Ace caught a glimpse of Maxwell's plane. It coughed smoke. Its rudder flapped uselessly. All of the other four Allied planes seemed to be chasing Maxwell's attacker. Ace chased hers alone, firing a quick burst with her single gun as it lurched past her cross-hairs.

Her quarry outdistanced her. Its twin motors were simply better. Much better.

Ace spiraled into a climb. She looked down to see Maxwell heading west. His engine sputtered and smoked. The other Ottoman plane also trailed smoke from its right engine with all four of her wingmates pursuing hotly. When the Ottoman's smoking engine quit altogether, the Allies would catch up and somebody was going to get a kill.

Ace eyed her adversary in the twin-Eindecker. It banked and climbed, chasing her upwards.

She dove, as a feint.

The Ottoman took the bait and pitched downwards.

Ace pulled up on the stick, hard. The SPAD had plenty of speed and arced around in a loop. Bullets from the Ottoman marked the SPAD's tail, and then it arced up and over.

Ace triggered her gun from an upside down position. Her bullets traced a ragged line down the center of the fuselage.

Ace barrel-rolled back to right-side up and chased the twin-engined Ottoman. The plane still had the speed advantage, but, oddly, it did not turn to strafe her or climb. It wove unsteadily in the air and dropped in altitude.

Ace frowned and muttered to herself, "What's going on?"

She looked around, seeing the receding dots of her wingmates but no new enemies. She looked down and blinked in surprise. Five gigantic hangars sat side by side like cozy caterpillars. Huge even for airships. The sleek, ribbed front half of an airship protruded from one hangar. It filled the vast space. "Well, that explains things!" Airships could carry huge loads of bombs and

could fly much higher than any airplane.

She chased her quarry toward Verviers. Clouds shifted. Next to the five airship hangars, the outlines of an airstrip and a cluster of smaller hangars appeared. Ace muttered, "A whole airfield? I'll have a lot of company in five minutes if I stay!" She broke off the chase, banking back toward France.

Her engine coughed.

Ace gripped her controls tight. Her knuckles went ghost white.

The engine coughed again.

She rammed the choke in.

The engine seemed to purr for a while, then sputtered to a halt.

"Dry as dust," Ace groaned in the abrupt quiet. "My fuel tank must have been holed."

Ace looked around. The twin-engine Ottoman had dropped a lot of altitude. It swooped back toward the airship hangars and the accompanying airbase.

Without any push from the engine, her SPAD was a poor glider. The enemy landing strip was her only option. Ace banked toward it. Her Ottoman quarry banked unsteadily to and fro. Short of the landing strip, its gyrations ended in a dive. It plummeted straight into the ground, erupting in an inferno of burning gasoline.

Ace winced. "I must've nicked the pilot."

She could already see trucks and soldiers fanning out below her.

As a point of pride, Ace made a perfect landing.

As a matter of survival, she raised both hands high in the air as forty armed soldiers surrounded her.

[guyworthey.net](http://guyworthey.net)



Accomplished ace pilot, surgeon, and crime fighter **Cecilia Carroway** travels the world with her five associates

- **Bert** – Hubert Ewing Devery Christopher Bostock III – a dapper smooth talker with a hot temper. Easily distracted by a pretty ankle.
- **Quack** – Boxnard Warburton Snana – a blond actor and master of disguises. His psychology training helps him irritate Bert.
- **Gooper** – Phileas Locknard – a broad, hulking London East-ender with pale skin and red mustache. He loves biology, rugby, and big words.
- **Tombstone** – Gregory Jamison – a bony, tall Texan. His skill with electricity rivals his skill as a sharpshooter.
- **Sam** – Sam Raia Biming – a short, round scholar who seldom misses a detail. He blushes to admit his fisticuffs abilities.

In **ACE CARROWAY AND THE GREAT WAR**, Ace is shot down behind enemy lines. She meets five fellow prisoners of war who will later become her crime fighting associates. Jailbreak is only the first of the perils they face as they thread a perilous path back to freedom.

