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Special Coverage of the 2000 Dawn Patrol Rendezvous, Dayton, Ohio

A SPECIAL DAY

by Brian Halberstadt

(September 30, 2000, United States Air Force Museum, Dayton, OH) - There was something special in the morning air. It was a damp, chilly, autumn morning. Nothing particularly unusual for Ohio in late September, except for the sky. The clouds hung lower than I'd ever seen. It wasn't just the common layer of fog that loomed over the valley. Instead of a uniform layer of white, there was a rolling bottom. While driving 70 miles an hour up I-675, it made me think of what it must have been like flying a morning patrol in a Sopwith Camel, staying about 100 feet below the cloud deck. If only I had a convertible; I could have had the open cockpit experience to go with it. The sight alone was enough to get me in the proper mindset.

Air shows are nothing new to Dayton, Ohio. The United States Air and Trade show attracts thousands every year to see the military's hottest, fastest, and most high-tech aircraft. The Dawn Patrol Rendezvous is different. It's a show that lets you get up close to the featured acts, and the planes fly slow enough to allow you to get a good picture, and still enjoy the same pass without squinting through a viewfinder.

And the more low-tech, the better. The crowd around Fred Murrin's Fokker DRI proves that. Sure, the plane is a beautiful piece of work. But the bulk of his effort was peeking out from beneath the cowling, an original 1918 rotary engine. The announcer said this engine was only 80 horsepower, instead of the usual 110, but Fred's working on one of those, too. No matter. He spent a lot of time before flight answering questions about the plane, and his engine. As he talked, he'd turn the engine, pointing the next cylinder toward the ground. Then he'd turn a knob, and a black stream of castor oil would drain to the ground.

Time to Fly

After passing the line of full-sized aircraft, you see another, equally impressive collection of aircraft. But these are much smaller. Radio-controlled model pilots from around the country were also there to put on a show for the crowd. And they would take to the sky first.

The first thing you notice about these models, most are much more agile than their full-sized counterparts. Many leap into the air into an immediate banked turn when they take off. Some do spiraling barrel rolls that would even impress the Air Force Thunderbirds. Still, a few are built to fly as much like the originals as they look. When they loop in the air, their pilots have to dive a bit before struggling to flip the tail over the top of the loop.

Even if most models don't fly like a World War I era planes, the risks of flying them are just as real. One pilot of a Fokker Eindecker ended up taking his plane home in pieces after an afternoon flight. We're not sure what went wrong, but the plane made a sharp, knife-edge turn low the ground. One wing-tip hit, sending the plane into a cartwheel. Hopefully, the damage can be repaired.

As impressive as the models are, there's nothing like the real thing. And the crowd moved toward the fence as the full-sized aircraft prepared to take the sky next.

Morning Patrol

Once the whine of model airplane engines fell silent, the activity on the other end of the flight line picked up. One by one, pilots and their crews started up their hand-built planes. A trio of Neuport 11's were among the first planes to taxi to the airstrip. SE5A's, Neuport 17's, a Curtis Jenny trainer, and a Siemens-Schuckert also roared to life.

The way these planes take off is unlike any other plane you'll see. Even with modern aircraft engines, many struggle to gain speed on the ground. As their tails lift off the ground, the main gear follows. And often, the pilots will keep flying level, just a few feet off the ground to take advantage of "ground effects," the added lift generated by the turbulence a few feet off the ground. Finally, they gain more speed, and are able to lift out of the ground effects, into a steady flight. Though one pilot said it's never steady, "on a pucker factor of one to ten, you're usually flying about a nine." One by one, they took off, flew around the museum a few times, and set back down. It's a routine that would be repeated many times throughout the day.

As much fun as it is to watch formations of these old airplanes fly past, there was one plane everyone enjoyed most of all, Fred Murrin's triplane. To most of us, it's hard to think that the airplane is still a relatively new invention. Flight is so safe and common, we take it for granted. But after hearing that old 1918 engine sputter down the airstrip, one immediately realizes that even though WWI pilots were brave in combat, it took a certain amount of courage to fly at all. The old engine lacks the steady sound of confidence modern engines do. As it passes by, wisps of smoke escape the engine, as it slings castor oil all over itself and the airplane. It's hard to believe in 1917 and 1918, that was the norm. And apparently, it was as unsteady as it sounded. During his second flight of the day, Murrin had to make an emergency landing on the strip behind the museum.

But there's more to this event than just flying around.

Events of the Day

While pride in their work is what drives these pilots to spend tens of thousands of dollars hand-building a WWI replica plane (and even hand-machining parts for rebuilt engines), there's nothing like a friendly competition to keep things interesting.

The first competition of the day: balloon busting. It would have been more fun to watch the pilots attack a helium-filled zeppelin. Two problems with that. While they like to watch, spectators don't like having flaming debris rain down on THEM, and the guns on the airplanes don't work. So spectators got to see a different kind of balloon busting. Pilots tried to pop helium-filled party balloons with their props. Sounds easy, but considering the balloons are released several hundred feet away from the plane, and the limited visibility a WWI-era airplane gives the pilot, it

proved to be quite a challenge. The pilots were probably able to succeed about a third of the time. Although surprisingly often, the balloon was left spinning in the prop wash before slowly deflating. It was still a kill.

After testing their abilities to hit a target in the air, the next test was hitting a target on the ground. In this case, four orange cones, marking the corners of a small box on the field. The pilots armed themselves with flour bombs. They're like water balloons with a red streamer, only filled with flour (but you probably already figured out that part). Again, a lack of visibility, and lack of bomb sights made this an even tougher test. Only one or two pilots appeared to hit the box, but it's hard to tell from the spectator area.

Of course, most of the action centered in the air. But there was a considerable amount of action on the ground. Antique cars from the WWI-era were on display and driving around. There were even military camps, where kids could help fill sandbags for the faux war effort. But those sandbags were no match for the advancing Allied army during an afternoon reenactment. Breaking into the groups, the re-enactors showed how each group covered each other as they advanced on a freshly sandbagged machine gun post.

There are far too many stories to be gathered at an event like this. If we had more time, we would have gone back to get some personal stories. We'll get that chance again in a few years. Another Rendezvous is planned for 2003. That should be extra-spectacular, because it will be one of several events throughout that year in the Dayton area celebrating the 100th anniversary of flight.

Photo Gallery 1

Thanks to one of my co-workers, Jeff Brown, for providing some great pictures for this collection.

October 7 Dawn Patrol Wrap-up

Game 1 North Sea Front, Front, Belgium vs. Germans 10/7/17

This North Sea game took place over the front in Flanders over a British/Belgium advance into German trench lines. The Belgians were Bart and Scott in Sopwith 1½'s doing contact patrol, with Rick Lacy providing cover in a Nieuport 17 (deck and wing gun). The German defender was Dory flying a Hansa-Brandenburg W-12 seaplane.

The first turn had Allies come in at 5300 and the German at 3100 and all move toward the trench lines. Turn two saw Bart descend to 2500 but "FITS lapse" and box with Rick not attack Dory! Dory got a 200 tail on the hapless Bart but missed! Scott descended to 2500 and Rick to 3000 (a very bad box setup by Bart!). Turn three saw Barton go to 1100, Scott did a head-on with Dory (2hf to Dory, Dory missed), Rick went to 1600. Turn four began with Bart going into position for troop observation at 200, Rick settled at 300 and Scot did an observation at 100. Dory blasted Scott with a 150 tail shot and did 3hf but scored a pilot hit. . Turn five had Bart doing observing at 200, Rick at 150, and another 150 tail shot by Dory on Scott's Sopwith at 100 altitude. Ground fire from machine guns opened up, doing 4hf on Bart's Sopwith and 2hf on Rick's Nieuport. Turn six had Barton doing more observation, being tailed by Dory's pilot and she missed the tail shot. Dory's observer did a head-on attack on Rick. Rick did 2hf on Dory from the tail while taking 1hf from ground troops. Scott chimed in doing 2 hf on Dory from the side. Turn seven had Bart stay at

200 doing his mission taking 2hf from all 4 ground-based machine guns. Dory stayed at 300 and was attacked by a 50 bottom shot from Rick for 7hf, pilot hit and smoke! But the Germans got a break. Scott had a "FITS lapse" and crashed into a trench. His pilot survived the crash, but was shot and lightly wounded in the right leg and was captured. Scott's observer escaped to Belgium lines and will fight the Boche again. Turn eight saw Rick attack Dory from the bottom for 4hf, and Bart did a tail attack and did a combined 4hf from pilot/observer. Turn nine had Dory attack Bart from the bottom and miss. Turn ten had Dory escape combat, her W-12 reached an emergency field and pilot survived the combat with a light gut wound. Barton completes the mission for Allied high command in turns 11 and 12. Overall the Belgian pilots did well.

Game 2 Western Front, Central side, British vs. Germans 3/7/18

The British, Barton (flying Lt. Erik Scott (3M/0K), Rick, and Scott flying SE5as were attacking a column of German troops. Defending the Kaisers troops were Dory (flying the ace Reinhart Strauss), and Stephen (flying Oppenheim (16M/5K)) flying Albatross D aircraft. Stephen Dale flew a Pfalz DIIIa. The German troop concentration was heavy and 8 ground-based machine guns would make it hot for the Brits.

First turn went well for the Allies; they dived to 400, while the Germans stayed at 1500-1600 (bad movement roll). Machine guns did 2 hf on Rick's aircraft. Turn two had Rick strafe and miss the troops; Scott did a bottom shot on Dory for 6 hf. Bart strafed the troops for 4hf taking 1hf from machine guns. Dory tailed Rick for 7 hf, and Stephen dale did 6hf on Scott from a bottom shot. Stephen stayed at 1700, 1400 above the combat. Turn three went badly for the Brits. Rick's prop was hit and he had to land. Stephen Dale did a bottom shot on Scott for 6 hf, while Scott did 3hf to Dory from the top. Bart missed a 300 tail shot on Dory. Turn four had Scott do a long attack and miss, Bart did a 50 bottom shot on Stephen and miss, while Stephen and Stephen Dale boxed around Dory. Turn five Scott climbed to 900 and Stephen did 6 hf with a 300 bottom shot. Dory did 4hf on a side shot to Bart, while Bart's 50 foot tail shot on Stephen did 7 hf. Turn six had Stephen Dale climb to 550 feet Scott climbed to 950 feet giving a 50 foot bottom on Stephen for 7 hf, while Stephen dished 3 hf to Bart on a 250 foot side shot. Dory did a 250 foot bottom shot on Bart and missed. Turn seven had Bart do 3 hf on a 50 foot bottom shot to Stephen Dale (bad shooting). Scott was tailing Stephen but Dory's tail shot did a pilot hit. Stephen made the British pay by putting 7 hf from the tail into the luckless Bart. Turn eight saw the British tailed and in trouble. Stephen and Dory however missed, some luck back to the Brits! Turn nine had Stephen attack Bart from the tail from 4 hf, but Barton escaped and the combat broke up. The British lost one aircraft and failed to break up the German troop column. A good day for the German Air Service.

Game 3 Western Front, Central side, British vs. Germans 4/7/18

This was a simple dogfight. Barton (Brian Woolsey (2M/0K), Rick Lacy (rookie pilot) in Camel 130s represented the British side. The Germans were Stephen Dale in a Fokker Drl and Stephen in an Albatros DVa. The combat began at 8900.

The first turn began with the planes moving toward each other with Stephen getting a 50' top shot on Bart for 5 hf. Turn two had a "furball" form with Bart getting in the middle. Stephen and Stephen Dale did a 50 "sandwich" on Bart for a total of 16hf! Rick did a 100' side shot on Stephen for 7 hf. Turn three had Stephen do a 100 bottom attack on Bart (who had dived to 7750') for 7 hf, shooting him down (RW gone!) and killing Lt. Woolsey. Rick attacked Stephen Dale at 9400' and missed a 50' top shot. Turn four had Rick dive and Stephen did a 100' tail shot for 4 hf. Turn five had Stephen Dale over dive to Rick's altitude and do a 300' head-on. Rick and Stephen Dale missed! Turn Six had Stephen Dales plane brake up in an over dive with his pilot parachuting to safety. Combat then ended. Overall a German win, but the loss of an aircraft hurt Germany.

Game 4- Western front, front lines, British vs. Germans 7/7/18

British bombers returning from a mission intercepted by German fighters. British DH-4s (dual rear guns) flown by Barton, Stephen, and Rick. The Germans were Stephen Dale (Manfred Rottendime (0M/0K) and Dory flying Alb. DV series aircraft. Combat began at 10,900'.

Turn one began with the British in formation; Barton's observer missed a 500' side shot on Dory. Stephens observer took a 150' side shot on Dory and missed. Rick's observer and pilot did a 500' head-on for 1 hf to Stephen Dale, he did 2 hf back.

Turn two saw the bombers break formation. Barton's observer tried to clear his gun jams from turn one (lucky for Stephen Dale, Bart's observer had a shot on him). Dory did a 50' bottom shot on Rick for 7 hf; Stephen Dale did a 50' bottom shot on Stephen for 7 hf. Stephen missed a 150' side shot on Dory, but Rick's observer hit Stephen Dale head-on for 4 hf.

Turn three had Stephen Dale do a 350' tail shot on Bart. Bart's DH-4 rejoined the formation and the observer cleared one gun jam. Dory did a 50' bottom attack on Rick for 6 hf. Stephens observer did 4 hf to Dory on a 200' side shot. Rick's observer did 5 hf to Stephen Dale on a 300' side shot including a pilot hit.

Turn four had Stephen Dale missed a 300' tail shot on Rick. Dory did a 50' bottom attack on Rick's DH-4. Barton's observer missed a 200' side shot on Dory, Rick's observer missed a 300' head-on shot, and Stephen did 2 hf on Dory with a 200' side shot.

Turn five had the Germans on the defense. Stephen's DH-4 pilot did a 100' bottom shot on Stephen Dale for 6 hf; the observer did 4 hf on Dory. Rick's aircraft declared escape and did so next turn (returned home safely). Bart observer missed a 150' side shot on Dory.

Turn six had the bombers in formation with the Germans attacking. Dory missed a 300' side attack on Stephen; Stephen Dale missed Bart (whose observer was reloading his only working gun).

Turn seven had the bombers in formation attack the Germans. Stephen did a 50' bottom shot for 4 hf on Stephen Dale and the observer missed a head-on on Dory. Barton's pilot missed a side shot on Stephen Dale, the observer tagged Dory for 3 hf from the side.

Turn eight saw Stephen Dale's plane fall out of control due to pilot blacking out. Dory did a 50' bottom shot on Bart for 2 hf (a gun jam was the reason for the low hf).

The bombers stayed in formation for turn nine, Dory took a 50' bottom shot on Stephen for 2 hf, Stephen Dale's remained out of control and crashed in an overdrive in turn 13 killing his pilot.

Turn ten had the DH-4's break formation and attack Dory. Barton missed and Stephen pilot hit for 4 hf at 150'.

Turn 11 had Bart's observer attack Dory for 5 hf and Stephen's pilot did 5 hf from the tail (observer missed).

Turn 12 Stephen missed Dory and she escaped combat. DH-4's flying in formation proved to be the undoing for the two German pilots.

September 9 Dawn Patrol Wrap-up

Game 1 Western Front, Central side, French vs. Germans 3/9/18

French bombers targeting a moving German supply train. The defenders were Dory and Rick Lacy flying Pfalz DII's, the attackers were Barton (pilot Adj. Henri Blestro (1m/0k)), Graham, and Ken flying Sopwith 1½'s. The Sopwiths had no observers due to bomb load.

Turn one saw the French fly toward the village, and the Germans approached the two-seaters. Turn two had Barton tail Rick's Pfalz and deliver 5 hf. Ken bombed the train and hit a flat car. Graham attacked Dory from the tail and missed. The German heavy AA hit both Graham and Kens aircraft. Turn three saw the fight get interesting. Barton aircraft, missed Rick in a side shot, was attacked by Dory for 3hf, but ground fire from troops and they caused a fatal head wound (about 2000-1 chance! the poor unlucky Moroccan). Dory got the kill credit, and Barts aircraft crashed harmlessly into the ground.

Dory did a 250' side shot on Ken and hit him. Rick Lacy tailed and hit Graham's Sopwith. Ken and Grahams bombs hit a flat car, but the bombs were too small to destroy them. Turn four had both two-seaters running from the Germans, but Graham was attacked from the tail from Dory for 5 hf and Ken was hit for 7 hf from the tail from Rick. Turn five had Rick doing 7 hf from the bottom to Graham; Dory tailed Ken and missed a 100' tail shot. Turn six had Ken escape (a great movement roll!), Dory turned back toward the fight, but she was too far away to matter any more. Rick blasted Graham for 6 hf from the bottom. Turn 7 had Rick tail Graham and he had both guns jam! Graham had 41 hf total with no critical hits and lived to fight another day.

Game 2 Western Front, Front, British vs. Germans 8/9/18

This game was a fighter sweep at 11,100' over the front. Barton flew Rich Littleton in a Sopwith Camel (150hp) (2m/0k), Ken and Rick Lacy's Camel pilots were rookies. Dory flew a Fokker DVII and Graham flew a Fokker DVIII.

First turn the aircraft mixed it up Bart did 7 hf on Dory, Graham's Fokker did 4 hf on Graham, and Rick did 2 hf on Graham. Dory took a 350' head-on on Ken for 3 hf and Ken dished back 2 hf. The next turn Dory missed Rick, and Bart hammered Dory for six more hf. Bart tailed Dory and did another 6 hf. Turn 3 Bart did a 500' head on to Dory and missed. Turn 4 saw Dory dish out 8 hf from the top to Ken and Bart did 5 hf to Dory from the bottom. Turn 5 had Bart tail Graham and to 6 to his tail, Turn 7 Barton escaped as the combat broke up as both sides withdrew.

Game 3 Western Front, Central side, British vs. Germans 9/9/18

This game was an attack of a German balloon. The defenders were Barton and Rick Lacy in a Fokker DVII (185 hp), the attackers were Graham and Ken in AW FK8 two-seaters and Dory and Stephen Dale in Sopwith Camels (150 hp). The balloon began at 400'. Barton's plane had only 20 ammo points (due to shortages) and used a special rule that was used at Gen Con 2000. Bart's plane was not maintained well and every turn a 5% change existed that the engine would blow its seals and start to smoke. Bart was lucky that this never came up.

The Allies came in and Germans got two turns of attacks on Graham FK8 and Stephen Dale's Camel. The Allies destroyed the balloon and only took minor damage from ground fire. Barton on turn 6 did a pilot hit on Graham Shepfer but was not fatal. All aircraft got home.

Game 4 North Sea, British vs. Germans 3/3/17

This North Sea game took place over open sea with the nearest land Allied lines 50 squares to the east. Two Neuport 17's (single deck gun) versus three German Albatros W-4 floatplanes. Barton and Stephen Dale were in the N-17's and Dory, Ken, and Rick Lacy in the W-4's starting at 8300'.

The first turn a lot of fire was exchanged, with Bart's plane taking 6 hf in the engine (lucky shooting from side and bottom shots) and the engine stopped. Bart did 3 hf to Dory for his one and only shot. Bart's plane dived away from the fight and made back to the coast and Allied lines. The pilot died in the crash.

Stephen Dale remained in the fight and after several turns was shot down by the Germans.