

## **Intrepid Airman**

First Lieutenant Dogan Arthur turned his Salmson 2 biplane back toward enemy lines. Twice he and his observer, Second Lieutenant Howard Fleeson had been turned back by German fighters. It was September 12, 1918 and the American Expeditionary Force had launched its first major offensive in the Saint-Mihiel salient. The American commander, General John J. Pershing, needed current intelligence on German troop movements and Arthur was determined to provide it. Since shortly after six o'clock that morning, aircraft from his 12<sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron had been soaring high above the 5<sup>th</sup> Division to maintain contact with the infantry below and assist with artillery spotting. Now, Arthur looked up to see nine German Fokker fighters zeroing in on his airplane.



Dogan Humphries Arthur came to Clemson from his hometown of Union in the autumn of 1909 to study textiles. As a cadet, he joined the German Club, but during or shortly after his sophomore year, Arthur left school.

The United States declared of war on Germany in April 1917. In July, Arthur enlisted in the Army at Chicago, Illinois. He trained as a pilot at Selfridge Field, Michigan and Gerstner Field in Louisiana. He was commissioned a second lieutenant in February 1918 and soon shipped overseas. From March to May, Arthur attended the Aerial Gunnery School near Rome, Italy. In July, Arthur reported to the 12<sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron near Paris. The 12<sup>th</sup> was flying observation and reconnaissance patrols in support of the Chateau Thierry campaign. After joining the squadron, Arthur met Lieutenant Fleeson who would become his flying partner and close friend.

That August, Arthur flew his first combat mission above the 42<sup>nd</sup> “Rainbow” Division and the 77<sup>th</sup> Division near the Ourcq River. From September 9 through 11, the 12<sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron stood down to prepare for its role in the coming American offensive.

On their September 12 mission, Arthur and Fleeson were twice turned back by superior numbers of German fighters. Undaunted, they attempted for a third time to penetrate the airspace above the retreating German ground forces. Jumped by nine Fokkers, Arthur was again forced to turn back toward friendly lines. Shot up by the Germans, Arthur’s aircraft crashed “amid shell holes and barbed wire”—but on the American side of the battle lines. Arthur and Fleeson delivered the intelligence their daring flight had collected. For his “extraordinary heroism,” Arthur was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

On October 18, Lieutenant Arthur was flying an artillery observation mission, providing adjustments to American field artillery, when he was attacked by four German planes. Arthur’s observer/gunner fought off the attackers until his machine guns jammed. Arthur dove for the ground and escaped by leading the Germans on a high-speed chase just 25 feet above the terrain.

On October 30, the intrepid airman was back in the sky again, this time with Lieutenant Fleeson once more on board as his observer. Arthur and Fleeson were one of several crews assigned to provide armed escort for a photo reconnaissance aircraft. By the time they penetrated 12 kilometers behind German lines, six of their fellow aircraft had already turned back. At that point, Arthur and Fleeson were attacked by as many as eighteen Fokkers. Heedless of his own safety, Arthur engaged the enemy to give the photo plane a chance to escape. He finally turned back toward friendly lines and fought his way home while Fleeson shot down two of their pursuers. For these missions, Arthur was awarded another Distinguished Service Cross, the Army's second highest decoration for valor in combat.

By the time of the armistice, Captain Arthur was commanding officer of the 12<sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron. In addition to his medals, he was credited with three enemy aircraft shot down. He was, according to historian Brock Lusk, Clemson's most decorated aviator of the Great War.

Following the end of the war, Arthur remained in the Army Air Service and he remained in Europe as part of the American occupation forces in Germany. In November 1920, Miss Eileen Farrell of Columbia sailed to Germany and she and Arthur were married.

As a pilot with combat experience, Arthur was called upon to train young pilots and test new aircraft. At 11:20 on the morning of April 24, 1923, Arthur took off from Langley Field, Virginia in a Sperry Messenger, a single-seat biplane designed to supplant motorcycles as a messenger vehicle. The airplane featured a nose-mounted 60



*The Sperry Messenger*

horsepower radial engine. Arthur had climbed to an altitude of 200 feet when the engine abruptly quit. The plane nose-dived into the ground killing Arthur on impact.

Arthur's remains were returned to Union and buried in the Forest Lawn Cemetery. According to a newspaper report, "After the service at the grave, officers of the United States Air Service who came in planes from Langley Field, circled in the air, paying last military honors" to their fallen comrade.

Dogan Humphries Arthur was survived by his wife, his parents, four sisters, and four brothers. In addition to Distinguished Service Cross with oak leaf cluster, he was awarded the World War I Victory Medal.



See also "Tigers in the Trenches: A Study of Clemson in the Great War" by Brock Lusk, (2015).

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