

## HERO OR TRAITOR?

**J**UST how does a man act when he is accused of treason to his country, threatened with death before a firing squad, with all circumstances against him? Major Carl Spatz of the United States Army Air Corps was in such a position during the late World War.

Major Spatz enthusiastically entered the war as an experienced flyer in charge of the training school at Issoudun. He who had been graduated from the U. S. Military Academy and later taught to fly by the Wrights was made a school teacher in France. And the job did not please him. He wanted to get into the fight. Week after week he petitioned headquarters for a transfer to a flying squad and each time he was denied.

It seemed to him as if the war would be over without his ever seeing actual combat. His superior officers felt he was an important factor as the trainer of hundreds of flying fighters, whereas he would be only one more fighter on the aerial battlefield.

To Major Spatz the climax was reached in the summer of 1918 when rumors came to him of a vast offensive soon to be undertaken in the St. Mihiel sector. There the air forces would be concentrated. His pupils all keenly anticipated the coming fight. The commander himself became moody, and was heard to mutter to himself uncomplimentary things about his superiors. And then one day he disappeared!

Captain Jack Hoover, a former pupil of the Issoudun school, and himself at

that time victor in five "dog fights," was puzzled when Major Spatz turned up at his flight unit without explanation. The Major was unshaved, his uniform wrinkled and stripped of all insignia of rank or station. Briefly he asked Captain Hoover for a good ship with dependable guns. The ship was provided. Away toward Germany went the Major.

Turmoil reigned at Issoudun. Their dependable commanding officer was gone. And after all little was known about him except that he was an excellent flyer. But, it was pointed out, he had a German name and spoke German fluently. There were people ready to say he had turned traitor and that it was no more than they had expected.

In the meantime, Major Spatz had indeed headed toward Germany, but to him it meant heading toward the fight. That first day he sent a German plane down in flames. When he returned to Hoover's unit he found that news of this victory had preceded him. Two German planes went down before him the next day. The third day passed without reports; the fourth day brought two more victories and another came on the fifth day. By dark of the fifth day Major Spatz had not returned. Captain Hoover was worried.

Major Spatz had encountered a flock of Fokkers, had fought them and brought one down, but not without injury to his own ship. Sorely crippled the plane was eased down into a shell hole without greatly injuring its pilot.

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The missing ship, the missing school teacher with a Teutonic name, the man who would give no explanation of his absence, here they were. The obvious result was court martial and sentence to the firing squad. Major Spatz declined to give any reason for his apparent treason. He even smiled sardonically.

The situation looked ominous for the Major. He had been missing unwarrantably and unaccountably from his post for a week. He refused to answer the damaging evidence. Yes, the only thing to be done was to regretfully turn him over to the firing squad.

But before "finis" could be written to the episode of Major Spatz's action, the real custodian of the ship in which the culprit, who was suspected of trying to escape to Germany, flew, had to be traced. And when Captain Hoover was found as the owner of the ship he told a story which made things look very different, indeed.

A man who all alone had nearly paralyzed the German Air Corps in that sector could hardly be executed as a traitor; he was really a hero. And so the Major wasn't shot.

But now the Army faced another dilemma. They certainly couldn't send this man back to train flyers at Issoudun, since it would be a bad example to the student flyers. At length, Major Spatz was given a handful of medals, both of the United States and the Allied Powers, and sent back home. Two months later the Armistice was signed.