

## Rochester Man Completes Record of Sky Battle over German Lines



An Indian Head insignia, such as is shown in this picture, enabled Arthur B. Curran, a Rochester attorney and during the War a member of the Lafayette Escadrille, to piece together a story of a thrilling air battle behind the enemy lines in France. In that battle, an American aviator was shot down, but lives to tell the story to his four children, born since the conflict. The story came to light when a former German soldier who came to make his home in the United States brought with him a picture of the plane and asked whether anyone could tell him of the fate of the bold birdman.

## Men Who Participated in Aviation Action During World War Supply Missing Links in Story: Former German Soldier Sends Picture That Starts Inquiry

With Memorial Day bringing back thoughts of past wars, and especially, to the present generation, of the World War, an echo of that holocaustic conflict is heard in an incident in which a Rochester attorney, Arthur B. Curran, played a part."

In the January issue of the American Legion Monthly, a picture was published showing an American plane which had landed behind the enemy lines near Beney, France, about which were grouped a number of American soldiers. It was sent by a German former soldier, now a resident of Philadelphia, Joe Bender, who desired to know who the pilot had been and what had become of him since the war.

The picture showed a painted insignia on the plane in the nature of an Indian head, which identified it as a plane of the 103d American Squadron, originally the Lafayette Escadrille insignia. It came to the attention of Mr. Curran, who was sergeant major in the squadron. In that capacity his duties included keeping a record of the squadron's activities, and he was able at once to identify the plane and its pilot. The June issue of the American Legion Monthly contains this information from him:

### Lieutenant Todd Pilot

"My records indicate that the pilot was First Lieutenant Van Winkle Todd, who was reported missing while on flight over the lines on Aug. 11, 1918. I quote from a memorandum made on that date:

"On Aug. 11, 1918, a patrol of four planes operated over the sector St. Mich-Pont-a-Mousson between 9:05 and 10:25. On this patrol, Lieut. Todd failed to return after being in a combat, during which he destroyed an enemy plane. Last seen being attacked by an enemy biplane and to fall in a nose dive about 15 kilometers inside enemy lines in the region of Euvetin, France."

"The 103d, still retaining the name of the Lafayette Escadrille, was then stationed with the Third Pursuit Group and flying from a field just outside Vaucoulers, France. The 103d was the first American air unit actively operating in the Zone of Advance against the enemy. It became a complete American Air Service unit Feb. 18, 1919, when the enlisted personnel of the 103d relieved the French enlisted personnel of their duties and the former American pilots of the Lafayette Escadrille continued as the officer personnel. From time to time I have seen statements to the effect that the 94th Aero Squadron was the first American

air squadron on the front. This of course, is not true, because the 94th did not commence combat work on the front until April or later. The first real officially confirmed victory by the American air service unit was that of Lieut. Paul F. Baer of the 103d. on March 11, 1918."

Van Winkle Todd was found following receipt of this letter from Mr. Curran in Matawan, N. J. He provided further details of the events when he was shot down over Beney. Flying a Spad bearing the Indian Head insignia.

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#### Controls Shot Away

His controls were shot away by a Fokker which had been one of a group protecting the biplane he shot down. He fell 4,100 meters in a spin, slowing up at intervals to the extent possible with rudder and motor only and as a result escaped uninjured from two Hun chase planes which followed him down. His plane caught in a tree and he was not injured in landing. Captured by the Germans, he spent the rest of the war in prison camps. He is now the father of four admiring daughters.

Mr. Curran prizes his complete and valuable record of the 103d squadron, one of the most valiant and picturesque in the entire service, beyond price. He has also his personal diary of the doings of the squadron, which contains many thrilling and absorbing episodes.

An autographed picture of Major William Thaw, a member of the original Lafayette Escadrille, as it

existed before the United States entered the war, and commander of the 103d squadron, subsequently, hangs on the wall of Mr. Curran's office. The Escadrille contained some of the greatest "war birds" of them all. The late Lieut. William Dugan of Rochester was one of its members.