

# Coffee

by

Vixxy Fox



“I’m a tell’n ya coffee ain’t good fer ya.” Gundy said this while looking over a fresh cup at his apprentice with squinted eyes. “T’was discovered by goats,” he growled and then sipped. “Ain’t nuth’n good ever come by goats.”

The sun was just coming up and the flight crew would be there for the first departure of the day any time now. Tossing down the dregs of the cup he set it down on his work bench and started moving out the cavernous door of the hangar.

“You’re just sore they ate the rudder off’n Nellie,” Grin told him as they walked. Nellie was the mechanic’s old Jenny bi-plane and his prized posession.

“They near eat anything and I’ve seen it with my own eyes. They’re walk’n cast iron stomachs... and yes they at the rudder off’n Nellie. That did piss me off. It took me a week to reskin the darned thing.”

“Told ya so.”

“Yes you did. Now... did you finish...”

“All done.”

“I seen spots on...”

“Got’em.”

Gundy took the rag from his back pocket and began a walk-around of the DC-3 they were prepping for the first flight. He's been spit and polish in the military and he was still spit and polish. That's why he'd been hired; to keep the three ship fleet looking brand spanking new.

"We used ta trade with the Fritzies back in the Great War. Coffee, tobacco, and chocolate was better than any money on either side."

Grin followed close behind his superior, watching his every move and mimicking it fairly well. Both were dressed in white coveralls that bore the stains of their trade and each wore a white cap similar to army undress. The Apprentice could always get his elder's ire up by telling him it looked like an inverted canoe and the white outfits made them look like gas station attendants.

"You told me that before," he muttered.

Gundy turned and looked at the younger aviator. The look was one of disapproval at his lack of respect. "You live through something like that and just try not to talk about it ya little snot. I'm sure I mentioned it once or twice."

"Or a hundred..." When Gundy gave him the look Grin added, "No need to be grumpy." He waved his own rag about in the air like a white flag. "You know I love your stories."

"They ain't stories... they're the truth. You believe 'em if you want and don't if you don't want. Those of us who was there..." and here he gave his younger a very hard stare, "We know the meaning of life. We know how short it is and how brutal it can be. Dying is nothing to the pain and suffering..." He stopped mid-sentence and then sighed. "You don't know this story so I'm going to break it gentle like so you can digest it in that little biddy brain of yours. Your Pop and I was best of buddies. We sailed to France and joined up together for the 'grand adventure'. He died and I lived."

Grin lost his grin and just stared at the senior mechanic for a moment. "You never told me that."

"Damned straight I never told you that. We were closer than brothers and he made me swear I wouldn't... least not till it was time."

"Why?"

The elder mechanic went back to wiping at the silver fuselage. "Cuz he wanted you to grow up your own way. He didn't want you to follow in his footsteps and go get yourself kilt doing sump'n foolish. He and I was pilots in the Lafayette Escadrille long before America even got into the war."

"The French..."

"*Le Armée de l'Air*; that'd be them," Gundy interrupted. "Nous nous sommes envolés pour la gloire du battant." (We flew for the glory of flying.)

If Grin's jaw could have dropped open any further it did then. "You speak Frog?"

"That's French ya pip... and don't ever let me hear you say otherwise or there'll be a straightening out. They're great flyers and don't ever think otherwise. S'ides, we never called

them that. They was known as *poilu* even amongst themselves. It means they had a special kind of bravery.”

“You said Fritzies!”

“That’s different.”

“Why?”

“Cuz I said it was. Now shut it so I can tell you some things.” He said this and then walked to the tail of the aircraft and wiggled the elevators, testing them for any slop in the bearings. “Your Pop and I got good and drunk one night after our first dogfight. It’s a pity the French can’t distill a decent whisky. That said; we drank Napoleon Brandy which left us both with terrible hangovers. In the future you take this to heart; if you drink you only drink straight whiskey and chase it with water. You get too much you spill it on the ground and only drink the water.” He motioned to the elevator and instructed, “Give that a wiggle and tell me what you think.”

Grin did so and nodded, “Feels tight enough; might need a bit of lube.”

“That’s what I thought. Get some oil on the bearings after we’re done. So as I was say’n; there are some things I’m a mind to tell you cuz it just seems the time that I should do so. Your mom told me you signed on to the army air corp, is that correct?”

“Yes... but I told her not to tell you.”

Gundy looked at the boy and frowned. “You mom is my wife. Did you think she would keep something like that from me?”

“I suppose not.”

“All right then; it’s time you knew more about your father; and this is something I never even shared with your mother.”

“Why?”

“Which why? Why I’m telling you or why I didn’t tell her?”

“The not telling her part.”

“Because she would probably not understand and it might hurt her deeply. It’s always best to leave the dead buried and at peace.”

“Was it bad stuff?”

“Yes and no... it was war stuff.”

They moved to the right aileron and the senior mechanic was satisfied with what he saw. “It all comes back to coffee,” he finally told his apprentice. “The French can’t brew a decent cup of joe to save their sorry asses. I tried using what they gave us but it was pathetic. Bob Patterson, a young fella from out Kansas way, informed us the Germans had good coffee. Your Pop actually

laughed and told him we'd be sure to land on their side of the lines before coming back just to pick some up. That was when we learned about the trading tree."

"Trading tree? This isn't another of your made up tales is it?"

They'd rounded now to the starboard engine and Gundy made sure to keep his hands busy holding onto the prop so he wouldn't cuff his step-son for being himself.

"This bird is first out so what do we do with the prop?"

"We pull it through."

"Why?"

"To make sure we get all the oil out of the lower cylinder."

"Why?"

"Because it's the lowest cylinder and gravity pulls the oil to the lowest point. Liquid doesn't compress so you can break a piston during start up if you don't push it out first."

"Very good... and what do you do before you ever pull a prop through?"

"Make sure the magnetos are switched off so she don't kick back on you and take your head."

"That's right. Now go and check and then come back. I'll pull while you push."

When the boy came back they muscled the propeller through with only about a teaspoon of oil dripping out of the exhaust stack.

"You were saying about the trading tree?"

"Well, sir, there was this tree where you could go during the dead of night and meet up with a German soldier for trading. It was not an acceptable practice on either side and if you got caught you could be shot as a spy."

"As a spy?"

"Could be you were trading in secrets and not tobacco. Wouldn't be the first time a traitor knifed his brothers in the back." Taking his rag out he wiped at the dripping oil. "Well, we hit a gold mine that night and our German counterpart felt the same. 'My name is Walter Adlersflügel,' he told us, 'But you will call me Fritz und I shall call you Sammy, yes?' He had a point, it was easier that way and Sammy was what we Americans were referred to in any case. Ironically Adlersflügel is a combination of words meaning eagle wings."

"Why ironic?"

"Because we got to be friends, and one night he tells us he wouldn't be around anymore because he'd been selected to fly for the *Die Fliegertruppen des deutschen Kaiserreiches*. The Fritzies always were the ones to use a lot of big words for things. That was the name of the Imperial Air Force. Of course even they shortened it to just *Fliegertruppe*. He told us over smokes that he had

a plan since he didn't want to shoot either of us down. Of course we felt the same so we listened."

'Look there, Sammy,' he told us. 'That moon in the sky is a quarter and it is gold. We should paint it upon our wings so we can identify each other. If no one is about, we shall then wave to one another and go home; but if there are many of our comrades with us we shall have to do our duty.'

"I prefer something more poignant,' your father tells him, 'Like a Death's Head maybe.'

'Posh,' I says, "Everyone and his brother has one of those. I think a big black letter K on the wing for Kaffee is the thing since that's what brought us together.' And that's exactly what we agreed to."

By now Gundy and Grin were over on the port engine pulling the prop through.

"So what's that got to do with my father being killed?" the younger asked the older.

"I'm get'n to it... be patient."

When they were done and the aircraft was all ready to go, they moved a bit away and Gundy pulled out a pack of cigarettes, offering one to Grin; something he'd never done before. The youngster accepted but when he attempted to smoke it he had a coughing fit and quickly snuffed it out under his boot.

"I don't know how you can breathe those things into your lungs," he complained.

"Practice... It takes practice and it goes a long way to sooth my soul." The mechanic took a deep lungful of smoke and then blew it out. With this the words began to flow. "About two months after that last meeting we got into one hellacious dog fight. There was airplanes everywhere and if you weren't getting shot up you were dodging them and hoping your wings didn't fold up. I'd already seen four collisions and then it happened to me. The Hun wasn't so lucky cuz he lost his tail feathers and went straight down. I lost my lower left wing but managed to stay airborne. What was left was near beating me to death in the slipstream and I was trying hard just to keep her even. That was when I saw your Pop off to my left flying as close as he dared. I tried to flag him off but he just kept inching closer like he was trying to figure out what to do. That was when a big shadow came over my cockpit and a set of landing wheels appeared right above my head. The German Iron Cross on the wing was as plain as the nose on your face, but so was the big black letter 'K'. Letting go of the stick I unbuckled and grabbed hold."

Gundy took another very deep drag on his cigarette and then dropped it in the dirt, crushing it out under his boot. "The German aircraft pulled up and no sooner was I clear of the cockpit loaming my aircraft rolled to the left colliding with your father's aircraft. The tangle of canvas and wire caught fire and he became a falling star. Fritz got me down towards the ground and then found a pond to fly over. I dropped off and away he flew never to be seen again."

There was a moment's silence and then he furthered, "I still blame myself."

For a moment he kicked at the cigarette butt. It was obvious he was trying hard not to scream.

“After the war I came home and consoled your mother best I could. You were just in diapers then. I suppose it was only natural that we would marry. I don’t regret not having any other children, Grin; you’ve been the best son a father could hope for.”

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The sun, now well up, found the pair sitting under the wing of the DC-3 where they’d dozed off waiting for the flight crew. Voices woke them and they came out from under to greet whoever it was. Oddly, they found the company’s manager walking a stranger around the airplane.

“Well,” the man said when he spotted them, “While we’re here I can introduce you to our Maintenance Manager.” Holding a hand out in Gundy’s direction he said, “Mr. Adlersflügel, this is Gundy Mitchel. Gundy, meet Mr. Walter Adlersflügel. He just bought the airline. Of all things he want’s to name it Kaffee Airways.”

The manager quickly turned to the other man and said in a lower voice, “No offense meant, this is America and you can name it whatever you want.”

Gundy came forward and slowly held his hand out. “Fritz? I don’t suppose you remember me...”

Before the mechanic could even blink, and before the manager could fire him for being so rude as to use a war time euphemism, the new owner had Gundy in a bear hug.

Not long after that they were in the hangar sharing stories and catching up; over a cup of coffee.



Squadron Emblem of the Lafayette Escadrille



A Kansas City coffee company, Roasterie, has taken its branding efforts to new heights, elevating and suspending an actual DC-3 airplane above the roof of its headquarters. A team of 30 engineers helped erect the DC-3 airliner atop the Roasterie headquarters at 1204 W. 27th St. in Kansas City.

Of the artist who created this wonderful piece they announced, 'We are absolutely thrilled to announce our sixth Roasterie Adventure finalist, Jason Ebberts of Overland Park, Kansas!'



Jason Ebberts, who was the sixth Roasterie Adventure Finalist, created this photo depicting an image of The Roasterie DC-3 airplane with "coffee bean clouds".

The photo idea came to Jason after many friends and family asked what the plane suspended above Kansas City stood for. He decided to provide the answer through one of his favorite hobbies - photography.

Look closely—the "coffee bean clouds" in this photo are close-up pictures of The Roasterie's Kansas City Blend beans!