



0. AMERICANS FLY FOR FRANCE - Story Preface

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The pilots of two bi-planes—one French, one German—fought a fierce dog fight near Rheims in the fall of 1914. This image, from *The Illustrated War News*, depicts the result when the German plane crashed. (*War News*, November 18, 1914.) PD Click on the image for a better view.

As royal cousins (“Georgie, Nicky and Willie”) were unable to do much to prevent their respective countries (Britain, Russia and Germany) from plunging into war - the Kaiser was later pictured with the caption “I did not want it” - the United States initially remained neutral.

Hundreds of young Americans, however - both men and women - joined the Allies. Motivated by ideals and a sense of adventure, they became soldiers, nurses and ambulance drivers. Some, like Norman Prince (a lawyer) and William Thaw (a flight instructor) were already licensed pilots.

While military aviation had barely developed at home, would-be American pilots also volunteered for service with France. They wanted to become knights of the air, despite the known dangers of early flight.

Before the end of 1915, American volunteers had transferred into the French Aviation Service. Thereafter, an idea began to take shape.

What if France created a squadron (called an *escadrille* in French) of American pilots who could fly combat missions at the Front? The unit could be commanded by French officers who would teach the young Americans to fly. It could be supported, among other things, by wealthy American businessmen who also wished to assist France.

Prince and Thaw, together with influential Americans like Dr. Edmund Gros (head of the American Ambulance Hospital in Paris) and prominent Frenchmen like Jarousse deSilac (of the French ministry of foreign affairs), made a convincing argument. After careful consideration, the French government allowed the *Escadrille Americaine* - or, the “American Squadron” - to form.

Designated N-124 (for (Nieuport), the initial group consisted of seven Americans commanded by two Frenchmen. They were:

- Captain Georges Thenault
- Lieutenant Alfred deLaage de Meux
- Norman Prince
- William Thaw
- Victor Chapman
- Elliot Cowdin
- Weston ("Bert") Hall
- James McConnell
- Kiffin Rockwell

The unit was an *escadrille de chasse* - or - a "pursuit squadron." Whom did they pursue? Skilled German pilots, often flying more sophisticated and powerful planes.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/AMERICANS-FLY-FOR-FRANCE-Fly-Boys>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/AMERICANS-FLY-FOR-FRANCE-Fly-Boys>

## Media Stream



Georgie - King George V

Image online, courtesy the U.K. National Archives.

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### Nicky - Nicholas II

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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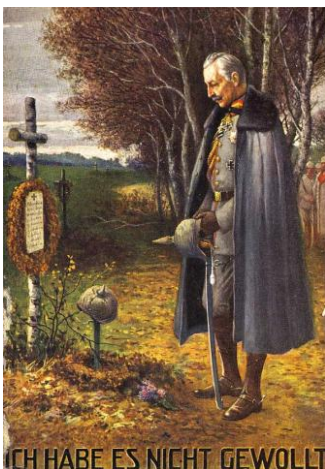


### Willie - Kaiser Wilhelm

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Kaiser Wilhelm

Image online, courtesy Deutschland Dokumente.

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### Norman Prince

Image online, courtesy earlyaviators.com website.

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### Dr. Edmund Gros

Image of Dr. Gros, online courtesy National Museum of the U.S. Air Force.

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### American Ambulance Hospital in Paris

Image, described above, online courtesy American Hospital of Paris.

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### Nieuport - American Squadron

Image online, courtesy Gallica at BNF in Paris.

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Captain Georges Thenault - Commander, Lafayette Escadrille

Image online, courtesy New England Air Museum.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Captain-Georges-Thenault-Commander-Lafayette-Escadrille>



James McConnell

Image online, courtesy New England Air Museum.

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Kiffin Rockwell

Image online, courtesy of the North Carolina State Archives.

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Norman Prince

Image online, courtesy New England Aviation Museum.

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### Norman Prince - Escadrille Identity Card

Image online, courtesy Early Aviators.

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### Victor Chapman

Image online, courtesy Early Aviators.

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### Weston (Bert) Hall

Image online, courtesy Early Aviators.

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