



War Birds: Diary of an Unknown Aviator (Williams-Ford Texas A&M University Military History Series)

John MacGavock Grider

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In the summer of 1917, more than two hundred American men volunteered for service in England's Royal Flying Corps, where they would be trained to fly with the Allies until American squadrons could be organized.

John MacGavock Grider, assigned to Royal Air Force Number 85 Squadron,

flying SE-5a pursuit planes, was shot down and killed some twenty miles behind German lines in the summer of 1918. He was not a hero, nor were his training and combat experiences much different from those of his fellow pilots. He is set apart only by the records he kept of his experiences during that year. This is Grider's story, but in telling it he encompasses the opinions and prejudices, the successes and failures, the lives and deaths of those 210 volunteers. He details the rigors of training, the terrors of combat, and the respite of social activities.

Of this group, fifty-two were killed in training or in combat, thirty were wounded, fourteen became prisoners of war, and twenty dropped out of training under the mental pressures of combat flying. After the war, many of these pilots returned home without rank or medals, suffering by comparison with the much-decorated pilots from the American front. This book is not an attempt to make heroes of these men, but rather to tell the story of one man and his friends, who fought for the United States in World War I as guests of an ally in a strange land.

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