

Volunteer Oliver Moulton CHADWICK

LAFAYETTE FLYING CORPS

(+ Bikschoe, August 14, 1917)

Escadrille des Cigognes nr 73, Cdt Albert Deullin



Oliver Moulton Chadwick was born in Lowell, Massachusetts, on September 23, 1888. He was the only son of a prominent family. His father was Arthur Kilham Chadwick, President of the Lowell Five Cents Savings Bank; his mother Julia May (Moulton) Chadwick.

Oliver was educated in Lowell schools and attended Phillips Exeter Academy. Although a poor student, he was accepted into Harvard University. At Harvard his academic success did not improve. In spite of his difficulty with the schoolwork, he did have a keen interest in sports. At Phillips Exeter he was awarded the Yale Cup for excellence in athletics. At Harvard he played several sports. He was most noteworthy as the goalie for the Harvard hockey team. Chadwick managed to graduate from Harvard in 1911. He immediately entered the Harvard Law School and earned a degree in 1914. Then he joined the law department of Stone and Webster.

From the very beginning of World War I, he felt that he must take part in it. He made his first efforts to enter the fight in the fall of 1914, but men were more numerous than munitions and he was not wanted. In 1915 he went to Canada to enlist, but was called upon to take an oath of allegiance to the King, which he would not do. In the spring of 1916 he could stand it no longer, so gave up his position and made application for the Foreign Legion. He was spending the summer of 1916 at Plattsburg for military training, and made more than one unsuccessful attempt to join the fighting forces. Then he was sent for four months to the Mexican border to fight in the conflict Pancho Villa. On his return he was convinced that the best service he could render the Allies would be as an aviator. He entered the Curtiss Flying School at Newport News Virginia. After gaining proficiency as a pilot before the end of 1916, he sailed to France. Here he enlisted, January 17, 1917, prepared to serve in the trenches with the Foreign Legion if he could not make himself more useful as an aviator. From January 23 to July 25, 1917, he attended the aviation schools of Buc, Avord, Cazaux, Pau and G.D.E. (Groupe des Divisions d'Entraînements). He was brevetted pilot May 4, 1917 (Blériot), and on July 28 was assigned to Escadrille 73, one of the "Storks" squadrons of which Captain Guynemer was the most famous member. On August 14, Oliver flew to help a British pilot that was being attacked by a German fighter. While in pursuit, he was attacked from the rear by two other Germans and his plane was shot down north of Bikschothe and he was killed. At the time, he had the rank of corporal. He is believed to be the first resident of Lowell to die in World War I.



The following passages from Chadwick's own letters to his family while he was at the front in France, with one written to Professor Edward Warren of the Harvard Law School during the final fortnight of his life, are of autobiographic value.



Escadrille N 73 S.P. 15, France, August 2, 1917

Dear Mr. Warren,

*"Here in a tent, alone, within hearing of the thunder of the guns of the world's greatest offensive, are two students of yours, of the Class of '14 in the Law School." The other, Biddle, came here in March and is also a soldier of the Legion, both being aviators. Here in France on all the public buildings is written "**Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité**" and the blood of the nation is making them even more sacred. I spoke of it this afternoon and got a quick response from Biddle. It was your talk to the Class of '14 at its farewell dinner, "**The Equality of a Democracy; equality, not in achievement or reward, but in opportunity.**" You meant what you said, you said it well, your words went home, and I think it will please you to know that by some of us, and I believe many, it is and will be remembered. It is because some of us have found truth in words like yours that we have been unable to "remain neutral in thought and act", even when so charged by our President."*

Sincerely Yours

Oliver M. Chadwick

Saint-Pol-sur-Mer (Dunkerque) August 3, 1917

Dear Pa,

"I am 'somewhere'. And I can describe it no more definitely than by saying that I should rather be there than anywhere else.

One of the first things I saw when arriving here was Captain Guynemer. I saw him go up, and an hour later come back. In this mean time he had got his 50th official air combat victory – and he must have dropped about as many more out of sight behind the German lines. One of the other things of interest which I saw here was a machine which had been hit by several explosive bullets. They do a thorough job. The men here are a splendid lot. It is the most famous group of escadrilles in the world and has the finest commander. If I don't learn how to be a good Boche hunter here, it will be my own fault. Wherever the pot boils fastest, there is to be found 'Groupe de Combat 12'. So if aerial warfare gets hotter at the South Pole than anywhere else, it is from there you may expect to get a letter."

The very interesting letters from his school-mate (LL.B 1914) and fellow-aviator Charles J. Biddle, abound in references to Chadwick . When the two friends were ordered to Escadrille N° 73, Groupe de Combat 12, Biddle wrote (July 28, 1917):

“This group is the most famous fighting one in the army and admittedly the best, so you can see that Chadwick and I were very lucky to get into it. It contains more famous fighting pilots than any of the other French flying units, one in particular, Guynemer, who has to date brought down about forty-eight Boches officially and many more unofficially.... Chadwick and I and two other Americans who came with us are the first Americans to be sent to this group. An escadrille, a squadron in the French service, numbers about fifteen pilots and machines. We are indeed fortunate to get into this crack group, but as it has suffered rather heavily lately, they had to fill up, and so we got our chance.”

It was only a little more than two weeks later that the two friends parted for the last time and Chadwick fell in gallant action. A letter of Biddle’s recounts the circumstances, and characterizes Chadwick, as follows:

*“The next morning, August 14, 1917, Oliver and I were not scheduled to fly until the afternoon, but as we were both anxious to get all the practice possible, we went to the field in the morning in the hope that they might need an extra man. A patrol was just going out, and being short one man they asked Oliver to fill up. I saw him off and was a little disappointed that he had gotten the job instead of myself, as he had already had an hour or two more over the lines than I. He went out with three Frenchmen and never came back. They reported that at about 9.45, shortly after they had reached the lines, they had lost track of Oliver while manoeuvring near some clouds. Shortly after lunch we received a telephone message, that the infantry had seen a machine of the type Oliver was flying shot down in the course of a combat from about 2000 meters and fall about 1200 meters north of Bikschote at a place known as the ‘**Ferme Carnot**’. According to the report, the French machine went to the assistance of an English one that was being attacked by a Boche (1), and at the same time was itself attacked from the rear by two other Boches.”*

12027	Oliver W. Chadwick	Caporal pilote E.V. d. 1914 durée guerre	I.L.C. 2-1/2 I.F. 2-1/2	venue du G-D-E. en solde du 29 juillet Parti en patrouille de chasse le 14 août à 9 h 10, s'appareil Spad 9-12829 n'est pas rentré, r.d. et parti disparu le 15 août et r.d. le 15 août.
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(diary of Escadrille N73; Service Historique de l'Armée de l'Air/ Vincennes France)

“Oliver fell between the lines, but very close to the German. It seems that both the Boche and French soldiers rushed out of their trenches to try and get possession of it, and a fight followed in which both were forced to retire. The recent French advance has, however, put the spot just within our own lines, and I wanted to go up myself and have a look, but it seems impossible. No trace could be found of Oliver’s body, but this is easily explained by the fact that pilots often have papers on them of military importance, and his body would therefore have been taken and searched. This would have been easy for the Germans to do at night, as the machine was so close to their frontline trenches.”



A few months later Biddle was able to identify the spot where Chadwick fell. Among the fragments of a shattered machine, he found a piece bearing the number of Chadwick’s plane, 1429, and a rough grave with a wooden cross on which was inscribed: “Ici repose un aviateur inconnu”. He felt sure that he had come upon his friend’s resting place. In a letter of November 18, 1917, he wrote:

“I am having a plate engraved by one of our mechanics who was an engraver before the war. This will show that he was an American pilot in the French service, enlisted as a volunteer before America entered the war. Around the grave now is a little black wooden railing, which we put there, and a neat oaken cross; on the cross a bronze palm, with the inscription, “mort pour la patrie”. The Captain and I are going back soon to put the plate on the cross and I have bought a little French flag and an American one, for I think he would like this.”

Chadwick's memory was honored in January 1918 by the award of the War Medal of the Aero Club of America, "in recognition of valor and distinguished service". In July 1919, the Croix de Guerre with a silver star indicating his citation for bravery in the Army Orders of the Division Aérienne, was presented in person to Chadwick's father by Baron d'Estournelles de Constant (2), on behalf of the French Minister of War. The citation reads:

Chadwick, Oliver Moulton, Caporal – pilote – aviateur

Jeune pilote, venu au front après quelques mois d'École, a fait preuve d'une haute bravoure, d'un noble caractère et, malgré l'inexpérience des combats aériens, a affirmé, dès son arrivée dans une unité française (SPA 73), l'ardente volonté de prendre part à la lutte.

Au cours d'une mission à basse altitude, sur les lignes ennemies, a soutenu un dur combat au cours duquel il est mort en Héros.

Le Général Commandant l'aviation française.

M Duval

In a letter to Nicholas Murray Butler (3), the President of Columbia University, Baron d'Estournelles de Constant wrote, besides of Chadwick:

"He has literally flown to the defense of liberty, and might be likened to a young god. The letters which he wrote me filled me at the same time with admiration and anxiety, for he had but one thought. He was intensely eager to devote himself to the service at the earliest possible hour. I have often thought that he was one of those whom we describe as too good for this earth"

1916			
HOSKIER RONALD WOOD	APRIL 5	APRIL 23 1917	☉ ☉
BARCLAY LIEF NORMAN	MAY 22	JUNE 1 1917	☉ ☉
CAMPBELL ANDREW COURTNEY JR	JULY 20	OCTOBER 1 1917	☉ ☉
MAC MONAGLE DOUGLAS	OCTOBER 3	SEPTEMBER 24 1917	☉ ☉
PETERSON DAVID Mc KELVY	OCTOBER 9	MARCH 16 1918	☉ ☉ +
DOOLITTLE JAMES RALPH	OCTOBER 16	JULY 28 1918	☉ ☉
RHENO WALTER DAVIS	DECEMBER 24	OCTOBER 10 1918	☉ ☉
1917			
☉ CHADWICK OLIVER MOULTON	JANUARY 17	AUGUST 14 1917	☉ ☉
PELTON ALFRED DIGBY	FEBRUARY 10	MAY 31 1918	☉ ☉
GUNDELACH ANDRE	MARCH 20	SEPTEMBER 12 1918	☉ ☉ +
DE KRUIJFF THEODORE	MARCH 20	NOVEMBER 6 1918	☉ ☉
LOUGHRAN EDWARD J.	MARCH 20	FEBRUARY 18 1918	☉ ☉
STONE DONALD EDWARD	APRIL 8	APRIL 21 1918	☉ ☉
OVINGTON CARTER LANDRAM	APRIL 20	MAY 29 1918	☉ ☉
EDGAR STUART EMMET	MAY 9	AUGUST 17 1918	☉ ☉
TUCKER DUDLEY GILMAN	MAY 9	JULY 8 1918	☉ ☉
DOWD MERIDITH LOVELAND	MAY 14	OCTOBER 26 1918	☉ ☉ +
TERRES HUGH	MAY 15	AUGUST 17 1918	☉ ☉
COLLINS PHELPS	MAY 17	MARCH 12 1918	☉ ☉
BAYLIES FRANK LEAMAN	MAY 21	JUNE 17 1918	☉ ☉
HANFORD ROBERT MARSHALL	MAY 24	OCTOBER 15 1917	☉ ☉
BIDDLE JULIAN CORNELL	MAY 25	AUGUST 18 1917	☉ ☉
PALMER HENRY BREWSTER	MAY 25	NOVEMBER 12 1917	☉ ☉
TYSON STEPHEN MITCHELL	MAY 25	JULY 19 1918	☉ ☉
BENNEY PHILIP PHILLIPS	MAY 31	JANUARY 26 1918	☉ ☉
PUTNAM DAVID ENDICOTT	MAY 31	SEPTEMBER 12 1918	☉ ☉ ☉ +
BLUETHENTHAL ARTHUR	JUNE 1	JUNE 5 1918	☉ ☉
LEE SCHUYLER	JUNE 1	APRIL 12 1918	☉ ☉
BOOTH VERNON JR	JUNE 3	JULY 10 1918	☉ ☉
SKINNER SAMUEL WIGGINS	MAY 31	OCTOBER 16 1917	☉ ☉



After the war, Chadwick's remains were transported via the Flanders Fields Cemetery of Waregem to the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial, a final resting place for America's first combat aviators. The Monument, located just outside Paris in Marnes-la-Coquette, honors the American volunteer pilots who flew with the French military prior to and after the United States' entry into WWI. Of the slightly more than 200 American Lafayette Corps volunteers, 68 would die before the war's end. These names are engraved in the memorial's stone. Sixty-eight sarcophagi are located in a crypt underneath the monument; however, only 49 contain remains.



Georges Guynemer

(born, ° Paris on 24/12/1894. – killed in action, Poelkapelle + 11/09/1917)

At the outbreak of war, Georges Guynemer tried to join the infantry, then the cavalry, but on both occasions he was refused due to his weak physical constitution. He was finally accepted into the Air Force and gained his pilot's licence in March 1915. Flying with the "Cigognes" squadron, he soon proved himself to be a daring and extraordinarily skilled fighter pilot. He was cited and decorated many times.

Having become a living legend, Captain Georges Guynemer disappeared during a mission ('high in a sky of glory' were the words used in the last citation relating to him), shot down somewhere over Poelkapelle on September 11th 1917, while at the commands of his plane 'Vieux Charles'. His 53

officially air combat victories made him one of the 'Ace' fighter pilots of the French Air Force during the First World War. Guynemer had taken part in more than 600 aerial combats and was shot down seven times and survived. He provoked an overwhelming admiration in all who fought alongside or against him. This monument here at Poelkapelle was erected by five Aces; the stork on the monument flying in the last known direction of the *Vieux Charles*.

In the modern Armée de l'Air of France, Guynemer's traditions live on. His motto, 'Faire face' ('Face your Fears'), was adopted by the French Air Force.

The most important American pilots in service of SPA 3 (escadrille of Georges Guynemer)

Only those who have minimum three official air combat victories were accepted into this escadrille.

Frank Leaman Baylies: Born, ° New Bedford, Massachusetts, 23/9/ 1895 - killed in action, + 17/6/1918

He volunteered for the Ambulance Corps in May 1916. His initial posting, on 17 November 1917, was to Escadrille 73 as a Corporal; he was the 13th member of the squadron, and was assigned airplane number 13. As Baylies wrote home: "Cannot afford to be superstitious.". A month later, he was reassigned to Escadrille 3. He was killed in action dogfighting Fokker Triplanes from Jasta 19 on 17 June 1918.

Edwin Charles Parsons: Born, ° Holyoke, Massachusetts, 24/9/1892 – died, + Sarasota, Florida 2/5/1968

He was assigned to the French squadron SPA3 in 1918 where he was credited with an additional 7 air combat victories for a total of 8 victories confirmed.

He joined the Navy during the Second World War as a Lieutenant Commander and ended the war as a Rear Admiral.

Notes:

- (1) **Wilhelm Reinhard** (March 12, 1891 – July 3, 1918), of Jasta 11, claimed the air combat victory over Oliver Chadwick. He became a flying ace during the war, credited with 20 victories. Following the death of Rittmeister Manfred von Richthofen, the Red Baron, Reinhard assumed command of Jagdgeschwader 1. In July 1918, he attended aircraft trials in Berlin. Hermann Göring finished test flying a Zeppelin-Lindau D.1, Reinhard then took it up for a test flight but was killed when a strut broke and the top wing collapsed.
- (2) **Paul-Henri-Benjamin Baluet d'Estournelles** (22 November 1852 – 15 May 1924), was a French diplomat and politician, advocate of international arbitration and winner of the 1909 Nobel Prize for Peace.
- (3) **Nicholas Murray Butler** (April 2, 1862 – December 7, 1947) was an American philosopher, diplomat, and educator. Butler was president of Columbia University and president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. For his work in this field, he received the Nobel Peace Prize for 1931

Sources:

1. Groupe de Combat 12 Les Cigognes: France's Aces Fighter Group in WW 1 (Guttman)
2. Icare, revue de l'aviation française: un américain aux cigognes
3. I flew with the Lafayette Escadrille (Parsons)
4. Spa 124 Lafayette Escadrille American Volunteer Airmen
5. Story of the Lafayette Escadrille (Georges Thenault)
6. The French Air Service War Chronology 1914-1918.
7. <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com> : Shirley's Genealogical Works
8. Memoirs of the Harvard Dead in the War against Germany Br. M. A. DeWolfe Howe, 1921
9. Harvard College Class of 1911, seventh Report, June, 1936
10. The Way of the Eagle, 1919 Charles J. Biddle
11. Special thanks to:
 - a. Mr. Neil A. Boyer, relative of O. Chadwick, for helping me during the research.
 - b. The direction and Mr. Christopher Sims of the Flanders Fields Cemetery - Waregem

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