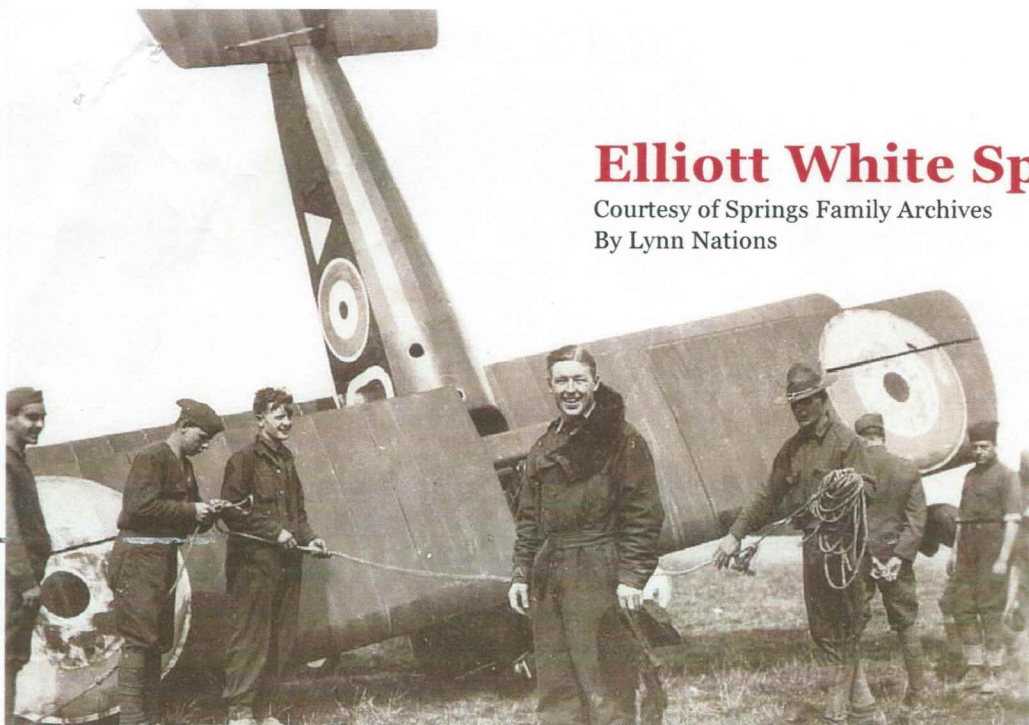


Elliott White Springs, Flying Ace

Courtesy of Springs Family Archives

By Lynn Nations



PILOTS OF A BRITISH ROYAL FLYING CORPS SCOUTING SQUADRON, CREDITED WITH GALLANT AND DARING WORK ON THE WESTERN FRONT, WITH THEIR MASCOTS OF MANY KINDS.
(© Underwood & Underwood.)

Elliott White Springs, son of Colonel Leroy Springs, developed his love of aviation at sixteen years old when he saw his first airplane at the County Fair in Rock Hill.

World War I began while he was at Princeton and Elliott learned to fly when the school formed an Aeroplane Corps to train civilian pilots. One hundred students volunteered.

Completely unprepared, without combat aircraft such as bombers, fighters, and reconnaissance, the United States entered the war in July 1917, with the 210 recently trained American student pilots.

Having no fear, Elliott became a daredevil pilot and almost killed himself on a daily basis, while in the overseas training period and was hand-picked and practically abducted by Billy Bishop, to fly for the English 85th Squadron of

the British Royal Flying Corps (RFC), and was given a S.E.5 fighter plane. He flew against the "Flying Circus", while in France.

Elliott shot down a German pilot during his first dogfight and felt mixed emotions. He later became a Royal Air Force (RAF), (formerly RFC), squadron commander and received the British Distinguished Flying Cross during his duty.

During one battle, Elliott saw a German on the ground, driving a new two-seater and lowered his plane to shoot him. His Vickers gun then jammed and the German was able to retaliate and shot at Elliott and his plane at close range. He continued his journey home at low altitude, while being drilled with enemy fire and eventually, losing all mechanics, he glided, covered in a trail of black

smoke, into British territory, landing in a crumpled wreckage, with severe facial injuries and a concussion.

While in the British hospital, Elliott received orders to return to the United States Army as a flight commander in the newly formed 148th Squadron in Dunkirk. Wanting to continue fighting with the British, he escaped the hospital in his pajamas and walked back to the 85th's base. He then complied with his orders and joined the 148th Fighter Squadron in Dunkirk on June 29, 1918, who were going to be flying unstable, small Camels. After a period of further recovery from his 85th Squadron injury, Elliott became the 148th's first flying ace. At the abrupt ending of the war in November 1918, he learned that his squadron had finished second in the number of kills with shooting down sixty-six enemy planes while losing only eight pilots. He received the American Distinguished Service Cross and was the fifth-ranking American ace of the war.

After the war, he returned to live in New York and pursued his love of writing and then inherited his father's Springs Cotton Mills at the age of 35. Elliott successfully grew the company into the caring dynasty we know today. He later became a lieutenant colonel in World War II. Elliott died in 1959 of cancer at the age of 63.

Photos: Top Left: Springs stands before a Sopwith Camel fighter plane he landed on one wheel after being riddled in combat, September 14, 1918.

Bottom Left: The 85th Squadron of the British Royal Flying Corps, on the eve of becoming the Royal Air Force.

Top Right: Elliott White Springs