

Alumni

Spring had just burst forth, the flowers were hardly at their best, the young bird had not yet flown lightly away,—yet Nature was at the height of her glory; for it was Spring-time and Life was young. There was an exuberance of life abroad. We had drunk the nectar of Spring. We were full of life. We walked so buoyantly. We worked so vigorously. We proceeded so surely. We hoped so fondly. We expected much of Life. Then like a thunderbolt out of heaven the sad news of Air Mail Pilot J. T. Christensen's death came to us. The tragedy of it touched us deeply.

Tinus Christensen was born in Denmark. When only four years of age his parents brought him, together with his brothers and sisters, to Blair. He was educated in this city and has had his home here since his arrival. Shortly after America became involved in the Great War, he enlisted in the army air service. He spent two years at the training fields in Texas and Florida. During a part of this time he was an instructor. After the armistice, he entered the air mail service, in which service he met his death on April 29th in Cleveland, Ohio. Prior to that date he had been carrying the mail between Chicago and Cleveland. The 29th was foggy and he had had trouble in finding the landing field. Before he could find it his plane developed engine trouble. Upon ap-



TINUS CHRISTENSEN

proaching the ground he found that he was directly over the city. To Tinus had come the supreme moment of choice. Rather than endanger the lives of the pedestrians in the crowded streets, he landed on a railroad right-of-way and was burned to death beneath his own plane.

The time for his funeral was set for three o'clock on May the fourth, at Blair. Early that morning a flag was raised to half mast in the city square and plans for closing all business places during the funeral were under way. While it was still morning a fleet of six airplanes arrived from Omaha. In these came a number of the close friends of



Tinus, coming to pay him a last and proper tribute. Shortly after noon, automobiles from all parts of the surrounding country came gliding silently into town, their low-humming almost becoming a part of the hush that lay over Blair that day. Fully an hour before the appointed time the crowd commenced to gather about the City Auditorium, where the services were to be held.

The time drew nearer. The crowd became more dense. From here and there ex-service men gathered, and as a sharp military command cut the silence, they fell into line, their uniforms of blue and white and khaki bringing anew the patriotic thrill, the quick-spring tear of war-times to the waiting crowd. Then, from far-off down the street came the sound of muffled drums, then the mournful notes of the funeral march. The ex-service men came sharply to salute. The crowd parted in clean-cut lines, leaving a clear space for the funeral cortege. Drawn by four white horses, kept at a slow, even pace by the uniformed men at their bits, an artillery caisson, draped in black, advanced, carrying the flag-covered casket.

Slowly and reverently the casket was carried into the hall. The pallbearers were friends of Tinus, representing the three branches of the service. Then came the honorable pallbearers, his friends from the air service. Then followed a tiny cluster of civil war veterans,—then the ex-service men, and finally the surging crowd.

Rev. Underwood, of the Crowell Home, read the comforting words in the second chapter of Hebrews in a low toned voice; and Prof. P. S. Vig spoke touchingly in Danish for the special benefit of the dead man's mother. The services having ended, the casket was borne on the caisson to the city cemetery.

Thousands of people clustered about the marble headstones awaiting the casket with uncovered heads. As the caisson approached the fleet of airplanes commenced circling far overhead, hovering like great birds above the procession. Gradually they circled lower and lower until—just as the casket was being lowered—they swooped down one by one, the engines momentarily shut off, and scattered flowers on the grave. The firing squad fired a last salute. The bugle sounded the slow, poignantly sad strains of "taps". His relatives and friends lingered while the silent crowd rapidly dwindled away.

Oh that so noble and so capable a pioneer in a new and wonderful line of human endeavor should die so early! That he was a pioneer and a worthy one we know, for by his good service he had won recognition in his own country and even in foreign lands. That he was noble and honorable we doubt not, for he was deserving of the highest tribute while still alive. Whatever of honor and fame came to him nothing could take the place of the respect and reverence he held for his aged mother.