

THRILLING AIR STORIES

AMERICAN EAGLES



BRITISH
9d.
EDITION

SUMMER

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

Eagles
FLY DEEP

*An Exciting
Action Novel*

By **ROBERT
SIDNEY
BOWEN**

**DOWN
PAAGUMENE WAY**
A Smashing Novelet
By **LOUIS L'AMOUR**



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THRILLING AIR STORIES

AMERICAN EAGLES



SUMMER 1944

A Complete War Action Novel
EAGLES FLY DEEP
By **ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN**

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EAGLES FLY DEEP

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

"Jinx" Maxwell, ace test pilot overseas, heads for a rendezvous with death when he undertakes a perilous mission in enemy territory!

CHAPTER I.

NON-COMBAT BLUES.

JINX MAXWELL hooked a leg over the veranda railing of the commandant's quarters at Army Air Forces Receiving Base at Hull, England, and absently eyed the collection of planes on the ground and in the air overhead.

They were of all types and sizes, ranging from two-place putt-putt trainers to huge four-engined Fortresses and Liberators. They presented a pretty fair composite picture of Uncle Sam's Army and Navy air strength, but just then they didn't impress Jinx Maxwell at all.

It was not because he was fed up with the war. On the contrary, he was fed to the teeth with the complete absence of war for him personally. Jinx had been Chief Test Pilot at the receiving base for five long months.

Before Pearl Harbor, he had been a roving test pilot for Yank aircraft factories turning out Government planes. When the Japs got tough that Sunday morning, he had gone to the nearest Air Corps recruiting office and signed up to fight.

But it hadn't turned out that way. His services were badly needed in a plane, but not in one slamming into battle against Zeros, Messerschmitts or what have you. He was shipped to England with the first units of the reorganized Army Air Forces, there to flight-check and double-flight-check every plane that arrived by air or by boat.

It was a mighty important job, but not even close to what Jinx wanted. As the days and weeks and months rolled by, he got so that he couldn't bear to look skyward at bombers or fighters coming back from sweeps or raids over Occupied Europe. To do so increased his deep-rooted determination to spin into the ground if his next request for transfer to active squadron duty was refused.

However, all that was behind him, now.

The nightmare was over. Two days ago he had handed Colonel "Chick" Tabor his umpteenth and absolutely final request for transfer to a fighting theater. Now Tabor had sent for him which meant that it had been granted. Before, the commandant had simply sent him a note. This time he'd sent an orderly.

"The colonel will see you, now, Captain Maxwell."

Jinx swung around and nodded at the orderly.

"Thanks," he said, and marched past him through the office door.

Colonel Tabor, seated behind a huge desk, gave him a brief nod and waved at a chair. Then he returned his attention to the Officer of the Day, finally sent him on his way. As soon as the door closed and Jinx and the C.O. were alone, the test pilot leaned forward and grinned eagerly.

"Let's have it pronto, Chick!" he said. "Here or Egypt or where? You know I'm not fussy, Chick, just so long as—"

"It's Aberdeen, Scotland, Jinx," the C.O. interrupted. "You leave tonight by train and report to Major Stickney, in charge of our Air Base there."

"Scotland!" Maxwell exploded, as the walls began to fall in on him. He couldn't go on, for at that moment, he caught sight of his transfer request still on the C.O.'s desk. Then he half rose from his chair and pointed a trembling finger at the document.

"You didn't even send it through!" he said.

"That's right, but don't go yanking your ripcord ring!" the senior officer snapped. "I didn't send it through because Air Forces H.Q. sent me an inquiry about you!"

"How's that?" Maxwell asked faintly.

"H.Q. sent me a request for my official opinion of you as a pilot. I told them you were tops. An hour ago I received orders to send you to Aberdeen. That's all I know about it."

Jinx Maxwell frowned. When the C.O.

stopped talking, Jinx shook his head to clear it.

"But Aberdeen isn't a fighter or bomber drone. It's just an experimental base."

"That's right," Colonel Tabor said. "I can't help you out, Jinx. I'm not happy to see you go. But I'm praying it's a job you'll like."

"It had better be!" the test pilot said savagely. "So help me, if they've got some new-fangled crate up there they want me to try out, I'll crash it on the take-off. And if I'm able to walk away from it, they can court-martial until they're blue in the face."

"I know, I know, Jinx!" the C.O. broke in gently. "But, you are a great pilot, and this is the price you have to pay. Keep your shirt on! I haven't the slightest idea what this new job is all about."

"To pull you away from here means it must be something big. Honestly, Jinx, I did all I could to get that transfer. It doesn't add up that H.Q. is simply giving you a change of scenery."

"Well, here's hoping," said Maxwell. "I don't trust H.Q. Sometimes I think that high and mighty body's only excuse for existence is to make guys like me miserable. Tonight, huh?"

"Tonight," the senior officer replied with a nod. "You can catch the Flying Scot at eleven. I'll drive you to the station."

"Okay," Maxwell sighed and stood up. "Captain Joe Sucker will report for duty as ordered. But he's not promising a thing. And if that be treason, then shoot the works, my friend!"

"Skip it," Colonel Tabor chuckled. "I'll buy you a farewell beer, instead. Come on over to the mess lounge."

CHAPTER II.

SUICIDE MISSION.

A FUSE is something that burns for a certain length of time, then blows up. Jinx Maxwell was a sort of human fuse as he reported to Major Stickney at Aberdeen Base, the following morning.

If things didn't break right for him, there was going to be a terrible explosion.

Major Stickney greeted him officially, provided him with a car and driver and told him that his destination was a little fishing village, Peterhead, a few miles up the coast. Questioning the driver added nothing to Jinx's fund of information.

The driver did tell him that Peterhead was somewhat of a mystery. It was definitely out of bounds to all troops, and all ranks, and nobody had the faintest idea why. It soon became apparent to Maxwell that the driver hoped *he* could supply the explanations.

Eventually, after endless armed guards had inspected the official travel order, Jinx Maxwell arrived at the door of a small and high unattractive building on the waterfront. Behind the building, he caught sight of a long covered pier shed.

The interior was little better despite some appearance of orderliness. The stench of oil, gas fumes and what-not were in the air.

The guard left him in the company of a slightly bald civilian who introduced himself as Mr. Dexter of the British War Office, and asked him to be seated. Then the man vanished, leaving Jinx to scowl at a bare desk, a couple of chairs, some locked filing cabinets and a few dog-eared British Admiralty charts on the wall.

Five minutes later, Dexter returned with two others. One he introduced as Captain Pendergast, of the Royal Navy. The other, who wore an American uniform, was Major Black, of U.S. Intelligence, attached to the General Staff. Dexter continued to act as spokesman.

"No doubt, Captain Maxwell," he began with a half-apologetic smile, "you would like to know what all this is about. Believe me, it is all very important. I believe that some years ago you were engaged in American Navy experiments with aircraft-carrying submarines. Is that right, sir?"

"That's right," Maxwell replied, "but, not with the submarine design end. I was hired to make the test flights of the plane, to be used. The sub was one of our S-boats. The plane was stored in a hatch formed by the forward part of the conning tower and the forward deck. The plane was a small folding wing job, and—"

"Yes, of course," Dexter interrupted politely. "But may I ask what your opinions are of the practicability of such an idea?"

"All right, I guess," the test pilot replied. "Anything that can carry a plane is certainly a good idea to me. But the Navy Department didn't think much of the experiment. The whole thing was eventually dropped. However, everybody knows that the Germans and the French took up with the idea, and put it to work, particularly, the Germans."

"Quite true," said Dexter. "Particularly, the Germans. Now, as a test pilot who has

flown all types of planes over a period of many years, what plane do you think is best suited for scouting work with a submarine?"

Maxwell scowled thoughtfully for a moment, eyed one of the Admiralty charts on the opposite wall.

"There are three or four types that could be used for that kind of work," he said. "But, there's one job that stands out to my mind. It's the Curtis Seagull. It's a small monoplane with a single main float and wing floats. It has a Ranger in the nose and upturned wing-tips. It can take a lot of pounding. Hinge the wings to fold back, and she should fit in very nicely. It's a two-place job, too."

Much to Jinx's surprise, the others in the room heaved sighs of obvious relief.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Captain Maxwell," said Dexter. "Would you say you knew it well?"

"Well enough," the test pilot replied.

"The landing and take-off possibilities of this seaplane?" asked Dexter.

A faint wave of annoyance slid through Jinx Maxwell. Why drag him up here to answer questions about the Seagull? U.S. Naval Aviation had one hundred per cent dope on that plane. Why in thunder ask him?

"A sweet ship!" he replied bluntly. "A pilot who knows his job could land her and take her off from a brook."

"Could you, Captain?" Major Black spoke for the first time.

"If I had to, I guess so, sir," Maxwell told him. "She handles like a feather."

For a moment, the room was silent. The other three exchanged glances. Presently Dexter looked at Maxwell and smiled.

"I believe you are the man we need, Captain," he said. "Before we go any further I would like your word as an officer and gentleman not to breathe a syllable of what is about to be told you, whether or not you agree that you are the man for us."

"Certainly, sir," Jinx Maxwell replied. A faint tingle of excitement began to ripple through him. Dexter nodded, and turned to Major Black.

"I think you are the one best qualified to explain the situation to Captain Maxwell," he said.

The Intelligence officer nodded, fixed steady gray eyes on the test pilot.

"In a nutshell, Maxwell," he said bluntly,

"we're in a jam, and I'm hoping you can pull us out. For some time we've known that the Huns have been working on a new type of U-boat, a big baby with guns that can give even a cruiser plenty of argument.

"According to reports, this boat can stay submerged indefinitely. It has no batteries to charge, its own air-reconditioning system and a lot of other stuff. Unless we get some facts and act accordingly, Hitler's going to pull some mighty disastrous surprises on our convoy shipping, come spring and summer.

"We've gone at the job of finding out, hammer and tongs. And, we've been lucky. We've put the finger on a man who can tell us everything we've got to know. This man is a German and a marine design genius. But he wanted more than a smile from Hitler for his contribution to the war effort. He wanted some relatives released from a concentration camp.

"The Nazis agreed, and then double-crossed him, when they thought they'd milked him dry. Well, he tried to make trouble. That was right up the Gestapo's alley. They slapped him right into a concentration camp himself."

"I should think they'd have shot him on the spot," said Maxwell as the other paused.

"Ordinarily, they would have," the major replied with a gesture. "But this case was different. They feared that they hadn't quite milked him dry. He was tossed into a concentration camp to be softened up a bit, so that he'd be only too glad to give all for the Third Reich, if they'd only let him out.

"That time is getting close. I know that from the lips of a man who escaped from that very camp only ten days ago. Another week or two, and this U-boat expert will be ready to sing."

The Intelligence officer paused and stared hard at Maxwell.

"We've got to act before he's ripe for the Nazi yoke!" he said. "We can get him out of the camp, but we can't get him out of the country, unless a miracle should drop in our laps.

"However, we can manage his escape and count on about an hour's freedom before the Nazis smoke him out."

"So, it's got to be by air," Jinx Maxwell murmured.

"No other way possible," the other replied. "But, it isn't as easy as all that. The concentration camp is watched day and night. For one of our planes to pop over

and down is strictly out of the question. If it wasn't shot down before it arrived, it certainly would be afterward! However, there is a way that we can pull off the second half of the escape."

The Intelligence officer stopped abruptly, got up from his chair and walked over to one of the Admiralty charts on the wall. It displayed the northern part of Europe.

"The concentration camp is here," he said, putting a pencil point on the chart-map. "Here, about halfway between Hamburg and Lubeck. Due east of this point, is an inland body of water called the Schweriner See, which actually empties by narrow river into Lubeck Bay in the Baltic. The Schweriner See is only forty miles from the concentration camp.

"However, on larger maps that I'll show you later, you'll see that it has hundreds of small inlets in which a small boat or a seaplane could hide for quite a while, perhaps not even be spotted from the air, the shore trees are so thick and overhanging.

"An airplane-carrying submarine will cross the North Sea, slip down through the Skagerrak and Kattegat, past Kiel Bay into Lubeck Bay before dawn on a certain morning.

"From there the submarine's plane will be launched and will fly to a certain inlet in the Schweriner. It will arrive at the exact time the escaped prisoner arrives from the concentration camp. The pilot will take the man aboard and fly back out over Lubeck Bay and make contact with the submarine.

"All will be taken aboard, and the submarine will submerge and be heading back toward England before the Nazis realize what has happened. Well, there it is in a rough sort of way. Do you think you can fly that plane for us? And if you think you can, will you? But, wait! Don't answer for a minute."

The Intelligence officer lifted a hand for silence and took a deep breath.

"Let me say now that your chances are no better than fifty-fifty, Maxwell," he said. "Maybe not even that good. The Nazis don't want to lose this prisoner any more than they want to see their *Luftwaffe* fly into the sun and never come back. We don't think they'll realize he's escaped until it's too late, but that is no guarantee.

"They may find out sooner and tear heaven and earth apart, to find him. Our trump cards will be the submarine and the plane, of course, plus the fact that we can

sneak in from a direction the Germans won't suspect. In short, we can slip in the back door and out in nothing flat.

"But even that won't be easy. You'll take off in darkness, and you'll have to sit down in a tricky stretch of water in little light. And you'll have to keep your wits about you to re-contact the submarine.

"In short, it will be tough going, Maxwell. So—well, I don't want you to take this as an order. It's just a proposition, and your answer can be yes or no. It's up to you."

The Intelligence officer stopped talking and the others waited. Jinx Maxwell kept them in doubt no more than five or six seconds.

"The answer is, yes," he said. "There are two important items that need more explaining, though. Where is the airplane-carrying submarine? And where is the airplane it is to carry?"

"I can supply that information." Captain Pendergast, of the Royal Navy spoke up. "So you need have no worries on either of those scores, sir. Both items happen to be right under this roof."

CHAPTER III.

CHANGE OF PLANS.

JINX MAXWELL stared at the naval officer and blinked a couple of times.

"Huh, sir? I mean, sir, what did you say?"

"Both the airplane and the submarine are right under this roof," the officer replied and got to his feet. Then, with a nod at the others, he said, "There is no time to lose, gentlemen. We had better let Captain Maxwell see for himself."

The other two nodded and stood up. Maxwell did likewise. And after a short trip through a series of workshops and storerooms, he was ushered to the rough plank balcony of what at first glance looked like an indoor swimming pool.

But it was an indoor drydock, three-quarters flooded. Square in the middle was a long snub-nouted submarine of the old Navy S-type. Several alterations had been made, however.

The conning tower bulged outward at the forward end. And the deck in front of it was humped two-thirds of the way to the bow, instead of being flat and gridded. At second look, Maxwell saw that the conning

tower bulge was in two sections that fitted together in the middle.

The deck hump was also formed by two pieces, fitted together in the middle. Another thing that caught his eye was a light, but sturdily built, hoisting crane that could be raised upward from its cradle flush with the port side of the bridge deck.

He knew, or rather guessed at once, the reason for the change in the exterior construction of the S-boat. And a moment later his heart did a couple of loops as Captain Pendergast barked an order or two at some oil-smeared men on the deck and bridge of the submarine.

"Make ready to hoist aircraft topside for launching!" he shouted.

The submarine's crew headed toward their stations at the double, and presently the huge shed was filled with the grinding of gears and the clanking sounds of metal against metal. The bulging forward end of the conning tower slowly parted.

The deck doors opened outward and back against the conning tower sides. The humped deck opened in a similar manner. And the flush hoisting crane was raised from its cradle at the bow and swung up and around into position.

As soon as the "hangar" doors were opened, crew members came forward and took position on either side of the deck opening. One of them caught hold of the hoisting crane hook, pulled down on it to lengthen the cable, then stepped lightly onto the engine hood of a plane that Maxwell could barely see outlined in the submarine's innards, and hooked it fast to a metal ring.

A junior officer in charge of the operation snapped out an order, and the plane was slowly hoisted up out of the submarine hangar. When it was clear of the deck and conning tower, crew members swung the hinged monoplane wings forward into place and fastened them securely.

Within fifteen minutes of Captain Pendergast's original order, there before Jinx Maxwell's eyes hung a Curtis SO3C Seagull scout observation plane at the end of the hoisting crane line.

He blinked his eyes, grinned, gave a little shake of his head.

"Well, well!" he breathed softly. "What do you know about that!"

"Rather nice, what?" Captain Pendergast spoke at his elbow. "I'm very glad that your expert opinion on the best type of plane

to be used checks with what we decided on for our experiments."

Jinx raised an eyebrow. "Experiments, sir?" he grunted.

"Yes," the British naval captain replied. "And just about completed. Frankly, it's a joint affair, between your Navy and ours. They furnished one of their old S-boats, and supplied this type of aircraft. We've been doing the construction work, and making the tests.

"When all is completed, the alterations on both American and British submarines will be done on both sides of the Atlantic. As a so-called authority on submarine construction, I was given charge of the work. A rush job, too. But I certainly didn't dream *how* rushed it was to be on this first one."

As the British naval officer finished, he glanced at Major Black, and Mr. Dexter, and grimaced slightly. Major Black grinned and gestured with one hand.

"The captain means," he said to Jinx Maxwell, "that it wasn't in his plans for the first completed boat to be grabbed right out of his hands, so to speak. He's been doing all the experimental work right here.

"It was only a few days ago that Mr. Dexter and I arrived with Admiralty orders for him to consult with us regarding the little business we are about to undertake. Fortunately for us, he was most enthusiastic and co-operative."

"But only because she's ready to put to sea, and I'm that eager to see how she goes!" Captain Pendergast growled, then chuckled deep in his throat.

"How did she test out on this kind of work, sir?" Maxwell asked the captain.

No tests have been made with the plane aboard as yet," the other replied bluntly. "But I fancy you'll have your own answers to that, come nightfall."

"Huh?" The test pilot blinked and gulped.

"The captain is taking her out shortly," Major Black explained. "We're all going along, of course, to watch you make the flight tests. We want to get everything checked as soon as possible, you know. Time is something that isn't any too much in our favor. When will you be set to shove off, Captain?"

The British naval officer glanced at his wrist-watch, then down at the submarine.

"Two hours," he said with a nod. "At ten sharp."

"We'll be ready," said Dexter. "Meanwhile, Major Black and I will go over things

in more detail with Captain Maxwell. This way, Captain, please."

They led Jinx Maxwell back to a different room. It contained less furniture and more detailed maps, plus scores and scores of aerial photographs. And then for a full hour and a half they pumped him full of all the important and minute details of the concentration camp prisoner's escape, rendezvous, rescue and trip back to English shores.

They produced maps and crystal-clear aerial photographs of every inch of ground and water that Jinx would fly over, so that by the time they were through, he felt as if he had known the Schweriner See all his life.

They were thorough, were Major Black and Dexter. They hadn't left out a thing in their painstaking plans, and they had overlooked even less. All that was left were the mechanical and physical operations connected with the affair.

"Well, Maxwell," said Major Black when they finally relaxed and lighted cigarettes, "how does it strike you?"

Jinx didn't reply for a moment. He dragged deep on his cigarette and stared at the mountains of maps and aerial photographs on the table in front of him.

"It sounds almost too good to me," he said presently, with a faint frown. "Too easy, if you get what I mean. Don't get me wrong, though. I'm not trying to back out. I wouldn't pass this up for the Congressional Medal and a farm. But it does sound almost *too* good."

"You mean because everything possible has been taken into account, Captain?" Dexter asked quietly. "Because nothing has been left to chance."

"That's an idea, sir," Maxwell told him. "It's too perfect. And I don't believe in perfection. I've flown too many cranky crates that were supposed to be the very last word in things fitted with wings. I always say, when something seems perfect, look out."

The test pilot thought he saw the other two exchange swift glances. But the action was too fast to permit him to do any eye reading. Then Major Black chuckled softly.

"Naturally, Maxwell," he said, "we checked on you from the cradle to your recent job at Hull before asking H.Q. to send you up here. But, I guess we must have skipped some part of your life. Just when were you with Intelligence?"

"Me, sir?" Jinx echoed. "Never. Why?"

"Then your ability to give the right answers must come naturally." The major smiled. "And I agree with you. Nothing is a cinch in war. Nor does it ever work out as planned—no matter how thorough the planning. This, I hope will prove to be the exception. But one never knows."

The Intelligence officer paused, stared fixedly at Maxwell for a moment, then spoke again.

"The toughest part will be strictly up to you, Maxwell," he said quietly. "But, if it will help any, I want you to know that I personally feel we have picked the one pilot who stands the best chance of getting away with it. And I say that without even having seen you fly."

"Precisely the way I feel about it," Dexter of the War Office echoed. "Your record, Captain Maxwell, speaks for itself."

Jinx grinned politely, and silently cursed the blush he felt crawling up his neck. He liked praise as much as the next man, but he didn't like it so much in a spot like this. It made him feel like a condemned man who gets a pat on the back just before he gets a spade patted in his face.

"Well, all I can say," he said with a shrug, "is that I'll certainly do my best to live up to your hopes. There's one thing you haven't told me, yet. When do you plan to try this stunt?"

"One week from this morning," Major Black replied. "The early morning of the sixteenth, to be exact. Your rendezvous time on that inlet of the Schweriner will be five-thirty sharp. By seven-fifteen, as I explained, we hope to have you and the prisoner on board and be on our way back."

The Intelligence officer broke off as Captain Pendergast entered the room. The naval officer's face and hands were smeared with oil and grease, but his expression was that of a pleased and contented man.

"I'm ready when you gentlemen are," he said. "The water is being pumped up to submerging depth, now. You can come aboard any time you wish."

Dexter nodded and started to speak, but a sharp knock on a side door of the room checked his words. He went over and opened it himself. Maxwell couldn't see who was on the other side, nor could he catch more than the mumble of an exchange of words.

His heart took a big leap, however, and his throat went a little dry, when the British

War Office official returned after closing the door. The man's face was suddenly very drawn and gray. When he spoke, however, there was no hint of emotion in his voice.

"A spot of bad luck, I'm afraid," he said, looking at Major Black and snapping a bit of paper he held in his hand. "Kohler is being moved to a camp in central Germany on Wednesday. Moved to Stassfurt."

A split second of stunned silence closed down on the room. And then Black exploded.

"Blas't it, no!" he cried. "That can't be so!"

"Unfortunately, it is," Dexter said, and handed him the bit of paper. "This just came through from London. It's true enough, I fancy."

The Yank Intelligence officer glared at the slip of paper, and slowly opened and closed the fingers of one hand.

"Those Nazis!" he finally grated. "Always tipping over the apple cart, just when a fellow's set. Well, this put us out on the end of the limb, that's all. Leaves us just one thing to do. Push our schedule ahead."

Black stopped talking and looked at Captain Pendergast.

"This mean no test runs, sir," he said. "Unless we can do some on the way. In other words, we've got to start on the real thing today. Right now. How about it?"

The British naval officer stuck out his under lip and scratched it with a thumbnail.

"What has to be done, has to be done," he said presently. "We're fueled and stored right now as much as we'll ever be. We'll just have to have a go at things, and chance it, I'd say."

"And you?" Black demanded, swinging his eyes around to Maxwell. "Think you can get well enough acquainted with that plane en route?"

Jinx's heart was a lump of lead in his chest, but he managed a thin grin.

"Looks like I'll have to," he said quietly.

The Intelligence officer didn't spout pretty words. He simply nodded and turned his attention to Dexter.

"Then it's settled," he said. "We'll tell London to communicate to them that Z Day is changed from the sixteenth to the twelfth. Just to change Z Day. All other details remain as it. Check?"

"Quite," the War Office official replied quietly. "And luck to us all!"

CHAPTER IV.

LATE FOR THE DATE.

FOR the umpteenth time, Jinx Maxwell swallowed hard and shook his head like a boxer waiting for the count of nine before getting the rest of the way up off the canvas. Just two nights and three days ago he had been test checking planes at the Hull Receiving Base and cursing his luck. And now here he was on the deck of a submarine a few miles offshore in Lubeck Bay. On the deck of a former Yank S-boat equipped with a Curtiss Seagull.

In exactly seventeen minutes by his watch, he would slip into the forward cockpit of the Seagull, be swung by the crane hoist into the water and begin his part of this crazy, cockeyed adventure—or whatever you chose to call it.

This was it! Everything had been done that could be done. From now on, it was strictly up to him. That was, of course, assuming that the escaped concentration camp prisoner, and those who had helped him escape, arrived at that Schweriner inlet at the right time—and without concentration camp guards and the Gestapo breathing on their necks.

"And *that*, you won't find out until you find out!" he told himself grimly. "So stop worrying, pal. Besides, you've got some flying to do first."

He glanced up at the night-shrouded skies. There were plenty of stars up there—too many for his liking. He'd have preferred a black overcast that would give him something to duck into in case he did bump into trouble.

Just two nights and three days ago—it actually seemed years. So much had happened since. He hadn't seen the sun since leaving the Aberdeen Base car in front of that rum-looking building in Peterhead.

They had boarded the converted S-boat there in that trick covered dock. Pendergast had submerged then and there and slid out to sea under water. Remembering the countless flydot islands in the river's mouth, Maxwell had had goose pimples for God knows how long.

But Pendergast was good at his job, and when he had finally surfaced they were well out to sea and in the middle of a rainstorm. Just before dusk, with storm clouds overhead, but no rain, he had tested the Seagull

for the first time. Everything had gone as smooth as silk.

That had been the only test. Through the Skaggerak, and on down through the Kattegat, they could only show the periscope during daylight hours, only run on the surface without lights during the darkness. It was decidedly not pleasant, particularly to realize that a mine or a Nazi prow boat or plane could blow you away in small pieces at any moment.

But that was all done with. This was night air he was breathing into his lungs, and right over there was a Curtiss Seagull that would soon take him, higher and higher into the good, refreshing air. And—

"Feel fit, Maxwell?"

He turned to see Major Black at his elbow. He nodded.

"Fit as I'll ever be, sir," he said. "No new developments? The radio, I mean?"

"None," the other replied. "We're keeping it dead. No sense taking chances. Having to rush things is bad enough. Well, I guess it's time, Maxwell. Luck, old man. Be seeing you at seven-thirty at the rendezvous. Keep your eye on the compass."

"Thanks. I'll do just that, and how, sir!" Maxwell replied as he shook the extended hand. "Kohler will be all yours at seven-thirty—I hope!"

The test pilot climbed into the front pit of the Curtiss Seagull. Less than a minute later he was in the water and had cast off the hoist hook. A couple of members of the crew gave him a shove, and the momentum carried him clear.

He switched on the Ranger and punched the starter button. The Ranger caught, and he warmed it up as he taxied slowly away from the S-boat. Presently, when he glanced back, it wasn't there any more. The darkness had swallowed it up.

He turned front, then cast a look toward the east. He could just see the first faint thread of gray light that etched the eastern rim of the world. He took a good look, as though to make sure he'd remember it for always, before he palm-heeled the throttle wide open.

"Here goes nothing!" he grunted as the SO3C's pontoon came up on its step and sent spray flying.

As soon as he had lifted the pontoon clear, he nosed the seaplane up toward the star-splashed sky to the south and held it there until ten thousand feet of black night air were under his wing. Then he leveled off, checked the time and eased back the throttle

a notch or two. For thirty year-long minutes he held the Seagull dead on a straight course across the sky.

At the end of thirty minutes, the dawn had grown to a band of gray on the eastern horizon, but it would be a while before full daylight doubled his danger. As a matter of fact, by the time there was enough light to see things clearly he hoped to be flying north, with the rear pit occupied by Herr Kohler, recently of a Nazi concentration camp.

"And how I hope to have him as a passenger!" he echoed the thought fervently. "The poor devil will probably be—"

He didn't finish his thought. At that moment, the dark ground ahead and a considerable distance to his right blossomed up in a great gob of brilliant red and orange. He sensed instantly that the explosion, or whatever it was, was close if not right in the area occupied by the concentration camp.

He also sensed that it marked the beginning of Kohler's escape from the camp. Major Black had not given him any details on how the escape was to be made. He had said simply that two undercover agents of U.S. and British Intelligence would accompany Kohler to the meeting place on the Schweriner's inlet.

Easing back his throttle until the Ranger quieted down to a soft murmur, he checked his wristwatch and compass course, then dropped the nose earthward a hair or two. Switching off the tiny instrument panel light, he hunched forward over the stick and strained his eyes at the ocean of ever-changing shadows below.

For ten long nerve-tingling seconds, the Seagull slid silently down into that ocean of shadows. Then, as though invisible hands had drawn aside a murky curtain, dim outlines and shapes began to come into his vision.

Another ten seconds, and the lump of ice in his throat melted considerably. He began to spot landmarks remembered from maps and aerial photographs. He was right on the beam. Directly below, was the tiny river that connected the Schweriner with Lubeck Bay. And just ahead was the northern tip of the Schweriner itself.

The necessity of keeping his gaze fixed on the western rim of the Schweriner, now under his wings, made it impossible for him to look at anything else.

His nerves and imagination went on a

spree. He was sure that the dazzling beams of Nazi searchlights slashed through the shadowy sky. He even conjured up the sweet belief that hordes of Nazi troops were below, waiting for him to sit down on the inlet's surface.

Suddenly he was able to kick his running imagination overboard because *the* inlet slowly slid into his vision. To spot it was almost like seeing again the old swimming hole of boyhood days, so much in minute detail had those maps and aerial photographs pictured it for him.

He instantly saw the dog-leg turn that opened up into a small mill pond. He even saw the ancient and weatherbeaten dock that was the rendezvous. It was just as it had appeared in the photographs, the bad light of early dawn notwithstanding.

Even the heavy overhanging trees were there on both sides to form a sort of nature-made hangar for him to let the Seagull drift into. Yes, everything was just as it was supposed to be. All he had to do, now, was to sit down on the surface of that small bit of water, let the Seagull drift in under the overhanging branches and let go the pontoon anchor to keep her there.

"Yeah, that's all!" he breathed and swallowed hard. "We make it, or we stay behind the eight ball for keeps."

He made the last four hundred feet of altitude with a dead engine. His only sound was the faint whisper of the wings in the wind. However, it seemed a year before he went down the last twenty feet, and the pontoon's hull smacked the water with a sound that, to him, was akin to the blast of a sixteen-inch naval salvo.

The pontoon stayed down, praise the gods, speed fell off fast, and the craft half-plowed, half-drifted toward the black wall of overhanging trees on the bank. No sooner had the Seagull settled than he was out of the cockpit like a monkey and scrambling down onto the pontoon with a fending hook in his hand.

But he had little need for it. Luck or perfect landing sense had timed the drift to a T. The nose of the pontoon nudged gently against the side of the ancient dock, then he had the pontoon anchor overboard and was letting the Seagull pivot by the nose and around under the overhanging tree branches.

"So far, so good!" he whispered to himself, pushed up his left sleeve and cupped his hand over his wristwatch.

The illuminated dial told him he had

arrived just thirty-five seconds early. Another thirty-five seconds, and it would be five-thirty on the dot. Another thirty-five seconds . . . thirty . . . twenty-five . . . twenty . . . fifteen . . .

Five-thirty on the dot!

He lifted his eyes from the watch and stared hard at the wall of gray shadows in front of him, straining his ears. He saw nothing but shadows, heard nothing but the silence of late night and early dawn. Little tingling shivers ran up and down the back of his neck.

He felt an overwhelming urge to smoke, to speak aloud, simply to hear the sound of his own voice, to break this silence that was like an invisible blanket wrapping itself tighter and tighter around him.

He tried to keep time by silently counting the seconds. He lost track quickly however, took another look at his wristwatch. What he saw was like a kick in the stomach. The wristwatch showed fifteen minutes of six—fifteen minutes past rendezvous time. And still he couldn't hear a sound, nor see a thing.

"No soap, pal!" he whispered to himself. "Something's gone haywire. Stick around much longer, and the S-boat won't be out there to meet you. Pendergast would be nuts to wait on the surface like a sitting duck in broad daylight. Stick around much longer and you'll be right up the well known creek with the oars gone!"

CHAPTER V.

COMBAT.

SIX o'clock came. It was still dark but the point was, it was six o'clock and *no* Kohler. Should he wait longer, and trust to luck that he would find the S-boat on the surface?

Or should he shove off now and make dead sure of saving his own skin? After all, this Intelligence business wasn't in his line. It wasn't part of his job. And he certainly hadn't asked for it. Why stick around on what seemed a dead issue just to be noble? "But suppose Kohler showed up after you've gone? A few minutes afterward? Maybe only one minute?"

He didn't speak the words aloud. But they were in his thoughts, and exasperation swept through him. He cursed everybody for getting him into this spot, himself for wanting to slide out from under.

Then his thoughts froze solid. There was

the sudden thunder of German-made engine. After two seconds of frantic search, he spotted it—a lone German plane which was streaking down to the west of him, far beyond the wall of trees.

With relief, he saw that the plane was not a swift and deadly Messerschmitt, but a two place Arado AR-95, B.M.W.-powered reconnaissance biplane, fitted for land use.

Then the savage yammer of machine-gun fire snapped him out of his trance, and his brain went spinning over in high gear. That the Arado was diving and firing on its own home grounds could mean but one thing—that it was part of the concentration camp area air patrol, and that its pilot and observer had spotted Kohler and his escort making their way to the Schweriner.

"Maybe I'm nuts!" he thought and heaved up hard on the pontoon's anchor. "But I'm not helping anybody by parking here. Not even myself. If that isn't what I think it is, then it's time for me to haul freight out of these parts anyway!"

Even as he reached this decision, he cleared the anchor from the inlet's bottom, stowed it in the pontoon compartment and shoved the Seagull out from under the trees with the aid of the fending hook. Then he scrambled back up into the cockpit, hesitated a few precious seconds longer until the nose had swung around to face open water.

Then he thumb-jabbed the Ranger into life, warmed her up as he taxied out into open water and gave the Ranger all she could take. She took it in stride, and Maxwell had the Seagull nosing upward after an extremely short take-off run.

However, he didn't waste time gaining altitude. He wanted just enough to permit safe maneuvering and to give him a good look around. It took him a mere two seconds to spot the objects of his search. About seven miles inland, west of the Schweriner, a brown-painted car was racing along the winding road.

In the air above it, wheeling over and down for another diving attack, was the Arado reconnaissance biplane. Even as Maxwell spotted it, its fixed synchronized guns in the nose spot twin streams of jetting flame.

As the Yank test pilot dropped his gaze, he saw the ribbonlike path of spattering dust in the road just ahead of the speeding car. But whoever was at the wheel was good. He weaved and twisted the car from one side

of the road to the other and still maintained his rate of speed.

Just one look was needed to tell Maxwell that it was only a matter of time before the Arado would nail the car, if not its occupants. The driver was crouched low over the bucking wheel, while two other figures in back were hugging the floorboards.

"Ditch it, and run for it!" Maxwell roared at the top of his voice, and slid one thumb up to the firing button on his control stick. "Ditch the car and seek cover, you fools. I'll do what I can!"

He emphasized each word with a savage smash of his free fist against the wide-open throttle and sent the Seagull cutting around and down across the sky. Maybe the Arado's occupants saw him and didn't care. Or maybe they were too intent upon finishing the speeding, twisting and weaving car below.

At any rate, Maxwell was able to cut in close and fired his aerial machine-guns in actual combat for the first time. His savage bursts of deflection fire caught the Arado smack on the nose, and the Nazi reconnaissance plane dived right through his hail of nickel-jacketed lead and took a terrific beating clear back to the tail.

It was like knocking sitting ducks off a fence rail—first the engine, then the hunched-over pilot, then the observer waiting to bring his guns to bear down on the speeding car, then the tail of the plane.

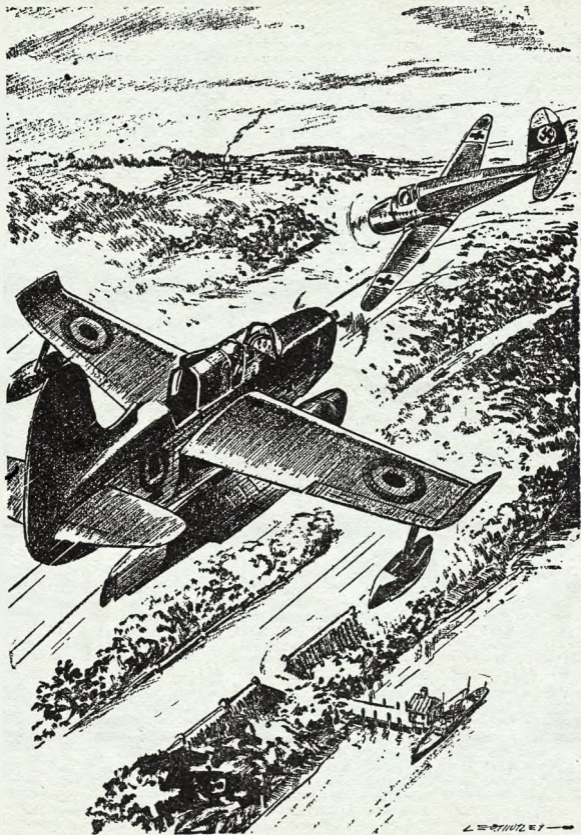
The Arado kept right on going down until the ground stopped it. Even then there was no fire—just a spouting cloud of dust and dirt, and a patch of flattened wreckage.

"Saints alive, it was me!" gasped Maxwell. "I did that! I got those guys!"

The words sprang spontaneously from his lips, and there was a flash of stunned joy in his heart, but only a flash. There wasn't time for celebrating. The Arado was out of the picture for keeps, and the car with its three occupants was still on its four wheels and spinning along the winding road.

But the men in the car did not see what Jinx Maxwell saw—Nazi troops ahead on the road between the Schweriner and the speeding car. There were too many of them to make the hope of the car tearing through them even a hope. They must have heard the car, for they were deploying on both sides of the road, taking position in the bordering trees and shrubs.

"Trapped!" Maxwell groaned between



A savage deflection burst caught the Arado light in the rear

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clenched teeth. "They'll never get through that bunch of square heads. And—"

He didn't finish the rest of it. He was too occupied with sending the Seagull plunging straight down for a point some distance ahead of the speeding car. As he hunched well forward over the stick and kept his gaze fixed on the car, he saw the driver twist his head, glance up and take one hand off the wheel long enough to wave a hello-and thanks greeting. Maxwell waved back and motioned for him to slow down.

But his gesture was unavailing. Holding the Seagull's stick between his knees he half stood up in the cockpit and began signaling wildly with both arms. For a few seconds, his heart was a lump of ice in his chest. Then his frantic signals seemed to get through.

The car lost speed rapidly, and as Maxwell went tearing over it, he saw the vehicle turn off onto a side lane, and streak to the south. Then he was zooming for altitude and cutting around and down at the squads of German troops moving along both sides of the main road. As he went rocketing down, the whole earth seemed to belch withering machine-gun and rifle fire up at him.

A section of the Seagull's windshield melted away before his eyes, and he heard the dull, chilling twang of rifle and machine-gun bullets ricocheting off the metal pontoon and the engine cowling. He didn't swerve an inch from his course, however. He held the Seagull steady in its dive and pressed his own trigger button.

His forward guns yammered back in savage reply, and his was the fierce joy of seeing numbers of the Nazi troops spin to the ground as, though an invisible axe had cut their feet out from under them. But when he pulled out of his dive and went power-whining up for altitude, he realized that his blazing attack had been little more than a weak gesture.

More troops seemed to spring up out of the ground. And one sweeping look was all the proof he needed that the speeding car was completely cut off from the inlet shores of the Schweriner.

"You saved them trouble!" he groaned out hopelessly. "All you did was postpone it. They'll never be able to reach that inlet, now. Any minute now, they may slap smack into more Nazi troops. Or more Nazi planes sent out to hunt them down. Rats! If only this was a land job, maybe I could do some-

thing about it. But, it isn't. It needs water, and plenty of it."

CHAPTER VI.

INTO THE FIRE.

PERHAPS the gods decided that Jinx Maxwell should have a fighting chance to fulfil his job. Or perhaps it was one of those things that happen in war. At any rate, as he leveled off, he spotted something that clipped the ice from his heart. That something was a small lake to the southwest, about four miles from the speeding car.

It was little more than a pond—a splash of water not big enough to be marked on any map. But it was long and narrow, and there were marks of what had been a road. It was surrounded by barren ground. There wasn't the faintest sign of a German soldier.

"Heads up, fellows!" he shouted as he dropped over and down into another screaming dive.

Fingers mentally crossed, he went roaring down toward the car. And when he was close, he let go with a short burst that chewed the road a short distance ahead.

The man at the wheel was smart. He diagnosed the signal correctly and cut his speed way down so that he could give attention to the Seagull. The instant he slowed, Maxwell hauled back on his throttle at treetop height, leveled off and went sliding past the car.

Flying with one hand he rose in the seat and pointed to the southwest.

"Lake!" he bawled at the top of his voice, and waved four fingers. "Four miles. I'll meet you there. Lake! Four miles that way. I'll land and pick you up!"

Three times he came back to slide low past the car, and three times he bellowed and gestured instructions above the throttled Ranger. On the fourth trip, the driver nodded that he understood.

Maxwell dipped his wings, opened up the Ranger and shot ahead to the point where the faintly marked lake road turned off the dirt road. There he throttled again and circled until the car was almost directly under his wings. Then he went streaking toward the little splash of water.

"And if it's got logs or rocks, or—" he muttered.

Brushing all disturbing thoughts from his brain, he concentrated on the job at hand. A moment or two later, he let out a long

sigh of relief. The little splash of water wasn't very long, and it was narrow, but its surface was smooth as glass.

There was no sign of rocks or logs to tear the Seagull's pontoon when he landed. Forty seconds, later, he was down safely and using the pontoon's sea rudder to steer the drifting craft toward the eastern shore.

"Nice!" he thought and listened intently. "Now, if they'll only step on it."

He frowned as he heard the faint drone of an engine. It was the drone of an *aircraft* engine—of several in fact, coming from the west. He turned his head that way, but there were too many clouds to see the planes. But they were German planes, all right.

Maxwell swallowed hard.

"Step on it!" he whispered. "Step on it!"

He stopped rooting right then as a crazy thought whipped through his brain. What about the speeding car? Did it contain Kohler and two members of Allied Intelligence, or was it a Gestapo stunt?

It was a crazy thought, but not too crazy. That diving Arado had missed the speeding car. And what about all those Nazi troops that had suddenly sprung up out of the ground near the shores of the Schweriner?

He could only stick where he was—and pray. He slipped his service automatic from its holster and got set to do what he could while he could. If the three men in the car were Nazis, he wouldn't stand a chance in the world of taking the Seagull off.

Ten seconds later he heard the roar of the car, then the car itself came racing over a slight rise in the ground, and skidded to a stop at the water's edge. Maxwell raised the automatic slightly as the driver and one figure in back came piling out of the car. Both were dressed in ragged peasant clothes, but the way they turned and reached in back of the car sent the Yank test pilot's heart pounding.

But when they straightened up they were not clutching machine-guns. They had hold of the limp, sagging body of a man who looked no bigger than a minute, and they carried him gently down to the water's edge. By then, Maxwell was out of the pit, jumping from the pontoon's nose to dry land.

"Kohler?" he asked the obvious.

One of the peasants nodded.

"What's left of him. He stopped a slug with his shoulder. Thanks for the quick thinking, pilot. Something ahead of us on the main road?"

"Just a mess of Germans," Maxwell told

him. "Looked to me like they were waiting for somebody."

"Us, probably," the other said grimly. "But you saved the day, pilot. Give us a hand getting him aboard. Then get out of here fast. The Jerries don't want to lose this guy."

"Quite!" the other peasant said in clipped English fashion. "And you'll have to run for it, too. Jerry planes will be swarming all over in no time now. Luck, old chap!"

That ended the conversation for a few moments. The wounded man was placed in the rear cockpit, and strapped in securely. Maxwell looked down into his pinched, dirt smeared face and winced. *Herr* Kohler didn't look as if he would last until sundown.

The Yank said nothing of his thoughts however. He moved forward to his cockpit. There he paused on the wind stub, one foot hooked in the cockpit, and looked down at the two Intelligence agents standing waist-deep in the water.

"What about you two?" he demanded.

"What about us?" replied one of the pair.

"Well," Maxwell said and gestured vaguely.

"Skip it and get going, pilot!" the man said with a grin. "Thanks, but don't worry. We like it around here. Just get *him* aboard the S-boat. Maybe we'll meet after the war, and compare notes. So long, pilot!"

He gave Maxwell another grin, then, with his companion, gave the Seagull's wing a shove that sent the plane drifting out from the shore. Maxwell hesitated a second longer, then scrambled into the cockpit.

Once there, he fed high-test hop to the Ranger, jammed the pontoon's sea rudder way over and swung the plane around so that it was pointing the long way. In the next moment he had given her the gun, and the seaplane was up on the pontoon's step.

Just before the pontoon quit the water he had a heart-stopping split second. There was hardly room for a take-off, and the additional weight of the minute-sized *Herr* Kohler didn't help any. He made it by the skin of his teeth. Branches brushed gently against the bottom of the pontoon as the Seagull climbed.

As soon as he was clear, Maxwell banged to the north and glanced down at the shores of that needle-shaped body of water. The dull brown car was a good half a mile away, racing south at the head of a moving swirl of dust.

The Yank test pilot blinked as the truth

came to him. Those two in the car were doing everything they could to help his getaway. They were trying to attract the attention of any Nazi patrol planes or troops in the vicinity so that the Seagull might not be noticed.

When Maxwell took a quick look at the cloud-dotted sky to the west, he spotted the answer. Five Nazi planes were peeling off in dives.

They were still high, and a considerable distance away, but he had the strong hunch that they were Messerschmitt 109s. At any rate, they were armed, and against five of them he wouldn't stand a chance. His goose was cooked.

"Sucker, that's me!" he groaned and shot a quick glance back at *Herr Kohler* slumped motionless in the rear pit. "A nice try, but it isn't even going to be close. Well, you're the guy who belly-ached for action. Here it is."

The rest stuck to his lips and stayed there as he glanced up at the five diving planes again. For a long moment, he sat frozen there, speechless.

"Well, what do you know!" he finally choked out. "What do you know about that!"

CHAPTER VII.

GIVE THEM THE MEDALS.

JINX MAXWELL saw the five Messerschmitts swerve away and streak south, toward a moving swirl of brown dust kicked up by a speeding car manned by two gallant men. "If I make it, it'll only be because of those two guys!" he told himself grimly. "Just two guys named Joe for all I know. Come on, baby. Really show us something!"

He barked the last at his plane and pounded his free fist against the wide-open throttle, trying with body English to get extra revs out of the thundering Ranger. With his other hand, he held the craft steady and so close to the ground he was close to kicking up a telltale trail of dust, himself.

Every few seconds, he took a quick look back to the south. The five Messerschmitts were still there. The last time he looked, the wings of the leading plane spat streams of red flame.

"Stay with them, Lady Luck!" he breathed fervently, as he looked front. "Lads like those just mustn't die!"

He swerved the Seagull slightly to the right to miss a patch of trees, went ripping

out over the broad reaches of Lubeck Bay.

The instant water was under his wings, he sought shore landmarks, picked his position exactly and put the snout of the Seagull on a beeline for the rendezvous point with the S-boat many miles out in the Baltic.

His watch read twenty minutes past seven. He gulped. He had just ten minutes in which to reach the rendezvous point—ten minutes to cover a distance that the Seagull couldn't do in under thirty-five full out. Would Black and Dexter and Pendergast wait? Or would they give him up for lost and not risk showing themselves to chance Nazi patrol planes?

He asked himself those and many other questions, raked the surrounding skies with his eyes. He spotted no German planes, and the tiny spark of hope within him continued to flicker faintly. However, if the S-boat weren't there waiting . . .

With every rev of the prop, another tantalizing thought slipped into his head. Was Kohler still alive? Was he on the true course? Had his compass gone haywire? Was the fuel gauge needle stuck? Were Nazi planes lurking up in those clouds and taking their own sweet time? Were they waiting to spot the S-boat, too, and add it to their morning's work of sudden doom?

Forty year-long minutes later his instruments told him that he had reached the rendezvous point—reached it only to see nothing but empty water stretching endlessly out to the four horizons.

Perhaps he had expected it far more than he had let himself know, because he accepted the terrible truth with hardly a quiver. The S-boat just wasn't there. She was probably on her way home.

All his efforts, plus those of two swell Intelligence guys, had been knocked high as a kite at the very last moment. Through clenched teeth, he cursed the war and everybody connected with it, particularly Major Black, Mr. Dexter of the British War Office and Captain Pendergast. So they hadn't waited. Just because he'd been a little late they had gotten cold feet and taken their S-boat down under!

He straightened in the seat as, low down on the horizon, he saw a long trail of black smoke and the unmistakable silhouette of a German destroyer.

"Did they sight that tin can and have to dive?" he asked himself. "Or did the tin can put them down for keeps?"

Damp, clammy fingers of doubt curled

about his heart. Flint-eyed, he stared at the distant destroyer until it turned westward and disappeared over the horizon, leaving him all alone with only water under his wings.

He kicked rudder and headed northeast. He'd need every drop of gas left in the tanks. But his only hope for his own and Kohler's skin was that the Ranger would keep turning until he could reach Swedish water many, many miles dead ahead.

As the minutes dragged by and the fuel gauge needle dropped lower and lower on the wrong side of the dial, the fear within him doubled and redoubled. But perhaps the gods were playing with him, if crushing a brave man's heart with fear can be called play.

Yes or no, the water half a mile ahead suddenly showed a streak of frothy white. The stubby snout of a submarine came poking to the surface. Wide-eyed, Maxwell watched the conning tower appear, and then the deck until the craft was awash.

Even then he was for a moment unable to believe the fact that there was the S-boat, its crew scrambling out of the open hatch and down onto the forward decks.

Some of them set out signal flares just in case he didn't see them. Others were opening up the hangar hatches, and raising up the crane hoist. Still others tumbled aft and ripped off the covering of the rear gun.

As he cut the Ranger's throttle and eased around into the wind, he saw Major Black and Dexter and Captain Pendergast waving at him from the conning tower bridge. It was all he could do to keep the tears of joy from blinding his eyes as he eased the Seagull down to a perfect landing on the Baltic's surface.

He had just enough run momentum to carry him to the S-boat. Just before he reached her side, he gave the Ranger the gun for a split second and booted hard on the pontoon rudder to swing the Seagull broadside so that her wingtip could be grabbed by those on deck and picked up by the hoisting crane hook.

"Pass it over!" he called to the seaman and shoved up out of the cockpit. "I'll hook her for . . ."

At that moment, his joints turned to jelly, and there was a terrific roaring in his ears. With swimming eyes, he looked down at his tunic, saw it was red with his own blood. As he stumbled and fell forward, hot bands of fire circled his left shoulder and the left side of his chest.

"Must have been . . . those squareheads

. . . pegging at me . . . from the ground!" he heard a strained voice mumble.

Then all was darkness.

When he could hear and see again, he found himself under blankets in one of the S-boat's bunks. Major Black was bending over him and gently adjusting the four or five miles of bandage that covered the upper left half of his body. The Intelligence officer saw that he was awake and grinned cheerfully.

"Just a scratch, Maxwell," he said. "But you spilled plenty of claret. How'd you get it? You didn't tell us that bit while you were out of your head and raving out the whole story. Who plugged you?"

"Nazi ground troops, I guess," said Maxwell. "Didn't even realize I'd been hit until I fell on my face. But, Kohler! Is he okay?"

"He's okay," the other replied. "Dexter is with him now. It was a sweet job, Maxwell. Very sweet. You used your head when things went haywire, just as I figured you would. Particularly that last bit."

"How's that, sir?" the test pilot grunted. "Last bit?"

"Heading for Swedish waters when you found out we weren't at the rendezvous point," Major Black said. "We would have stuck around, only we couldn't. A Nazi destroyer stumbled on us. We had to get out in a hurry and keep going. It was after the rendezvous time then. I hoped you'd use your head when you did show up. So we headed for Swedish waters, too, and surfaced when we were well out of that destroyer's area of prowl.

"And—well, there you were, thank heaven. So, all's well that ends well. And there'll be a medal in this for you, Maxwell."

"Not for me," the test pilot said. "For two other guys. Maybe you know their names. You probably do. They did the tough part. Me, I just did the flying. Give them the medals, and give me a nice slip of paper from Air Forces H.Q."

"Come again?" Major Black grunted and looked puzzled.

"Orders from H.Q. to report to an active service outfit," Jinx Maxwell said. "And I don't mean active *test flying*, either! Can do, sir?"

"Can do, Maxwell," the other said and grinned. "I'll even top it. I'll get permission for you to choose your own outfit. Okay?"

Maxwell didn't reply, but the faint smile on his face indicated that it was very okay, indeed.

MR. UCHIDA WAITS WITHOUT

By HAL WHITE

Once pals on the football field, a couple of flying partners know just what to do with a little Japanese major when they need to make a touchdown!

THE twin-motored Douglas A20 vibrated with the jolting of Pete Brady's guns in the rear blister, but it was no use. Captain Bill Carson gripped the wheel of the American light bomber and knew with cold, bitter certainty that you might as well try to put out a forest fire with an eye-dropper as to fight forty Zeros with one crippled Yank ship.

The port motor was gone—wedged tight with Jap lead—and the starboard motor was beginning to buck and backfire. Ted Roberts, the bombardier, was knocked out. Maybe he was dead. Anyway, he didn't answer the pilot's anxious efforts to raise him on the intercom.

There were only the three of them in the ship, and if Roberts was dead and beyond help, the thing to do was to get the heck out. Hit the silk and trust to luck in the dense island jungle below—if the Japs let them get that far in their chutes.

Carson's lean, hard, football body was tense as he spoke into the throat mike.

"Pilot to gunner. Howya, feller?"

The short, wide-shouldered sergeant-gunner didn't answer at once and the guns were silent. Carson gasped.

"Pete! Pete—answer! All right?"

The answer came in the form of a rattling burst from the guns. Carson, banking sharply to clear a pair of Jap ships cutting in front of him, saw Brady's target catch fire and head for the ground. Not that it made any difference now. This was the finish.

Then Brady's quiet drawl came over the intercom:

"Sir, Mr. Uchida waits without!"

Carson laughed. He laughed aloud, but there was no humor in the sound. Brady's answering laugh came over the earphones.

"Not bad, huh?" said the sergeant-gunner.

Uchida was Major Uchida, ace flier and squadron commander, and it was his outfit—all of it—that had come up to dispute the attempted look-see of the Yank ship. Uchida

had not been caught napping. Right now he was up there, circling, his ship distinctive with its diagonal markings and red wing-tips. And when the Yanks took to their chutes he would be right down to machine-gun them in their shroud lines, in the best Nip tradition.

But the ironic joke between Carson and Brady—"Mr. Uchida waits without"—went a long way back. It went back to the time when Carson, as a young lawyer, had been named executor of a large Southern California landed estate.

Much of that land was rented to Japanese market gardeners, and Tamao Uchida was their business agent. As such, he was often a visitor at Carson's offices in the port city of San Pedro, and it was the duty of Pete Brady, as Carson's secretary, to announce him.

It had been somewhat of a joke between them, even then, for the two had played, shoulder to muscled shoulder, on many a football field. They had been "Pete" and "Bill" to each other from the first. When the natty and formal Uchida arrived at the office, bowing and scraping and hissing between his teeth with exaggerated politeness, Brady would announce with dignity:

"Sir, Mr. Uchida waits without!"

And Carson would reply low, for Brady's ears alone:

"Herd the Nip so-and-so in here, where I can kill him."

Subsequent events had justified Carson's dislike and suspicion of the squat, bow-legged Oriental. He had escaped Southern California just one jump ahead of the reaching hands of the F.B.I., and it was revealed that his business agent activities had been just a blind for extensive spy work at the port.

Now here he was again, many months later, and it was the Yanks' move. Uchida was waiting.

The starboard Cyclone began trickling slow, acrid smoke. It filled the pit and Carson blinked his eyes, straining to bring his

fixed machine-guns to bear on a Jap cutting across his nose. The guns didn't respond. They were haywire, too. Everything was hay-

Carson said, "Pete, I'm having a look at Ted. He's copped one."

He put down the controls on the robot and ducked down to the bombardier's compartment. Ted Roberts was a quiet huddle there, a trickle of blood running from his mouth. His eyes were blank and sightless. Carson returned to his controls.

"Ted's finished," he said into the mike. And then he added, as a fresh hail of slugs cut the rudder controls, "and it's time for you and me to bail out. So get going. That's an order!"

"Okay. Be seein' yuh, pal," Brady said, "and make it fast, will you?"

"Pete, don't pull your ripcord until you're close to the ground. If you do—"

"I know. We'll fox the guy. Cheerio!"

Carson felt the slight lurch of the ship as Brady left it. He saw the man's body spin downward, saw Uchida's ship follow at once. Carson smiled grimly. Uchida couldn't get either of them in the air—but maybe it would be better to let the Nip butcher machine-gun them and have it over with, rather than fall into his hands later.

"Ted, old man," the pilot said half aloud. "You might be a whole lot luckier than we are, at that. Well, so long, laddie."

Turning and twisting in air, he caught glimpses of Brady below, finally saw the sergeant's chute bloom white above the green of the jungle. Moments later, he was swinging in his own shroud lines, and the green of the matted forest was coming nearer.

Only two hundred feet up now, and Carson spotted a clearing of considerable size. It had not been visible before because it was carpeted with grass and tangled undergrowth. He hauled in his shroud lines. Brady had done the same, and was on the ground, spilling the air from his chute when Carson landed near him.

"Into the jungle," Carson shouted as the baffled Uchida slid low over the clearing with an angry screaming of wings and motor. "He'll radio where we are, and they'll be after us. I'll risk anything the jungle can offer rather than fall into that guy's hands."

"You said it, Bill," Brady was running easily beside him—running as they had so often done before. Only here there was no crowd, no crisp November air, no clean, solid earth and white lines beneath their

flying feet. This was the jungle—hot, odorous with rank growth, dangerous with lurking things.

"May take us a while, Bill" the sergeant said, "but we'll make it back to the field, and—hey, look!"

Japs, a whole squad of them, were fanning out ahead. Their bayonets glistened in the sun, and they were grinning. . . .

On the way to Uchida's drome, they passed the wreck of the Douglas. It had buried itself deep, and every part of it above ground had burned. The damp jungle foliage all about was still smoking sullenly.

Roberts was in that mess—and Roberts was probably a very lucky guy. . . .

Bayonets urged them on. The sweat ran in streams down their faces and under their clothing. They spoke little, but, glancing at each other from time to time, each knew the other's grim thoughts.

The drome lay on the edge of a forest. The whole place had been so cleverly camouflaged that from a thousand feet up it looked like solid jungle. Carson and Brady knew, because they had been over it.

Mechanics were working on several Zeros drawn up in the shade. As the Yanks and their captors crossed the field, another ship came down to a landing. This one had diagonal stripes and red wing-tips.

Five minutes later the two American prisoners stood before the major. Uchida smiled an oily grin.

"A very great pleasure," he said in good English. "More than you know, perhaps. Because, Mr. Carson, I heard some of the things you said in your office back in California. You shall see how a 'Jap so-and-so' can deal with those who fail to respect us."

"I should have twisted your neck then," Carson said evenly. "It would have been a service to humanity."

Uchida laughed and lighted a cigarette, flicking out the match slowly and deliberately. Then he snapped out an order, and the arms of both Americans were pinioned behind them. The major advanced on Carson, and without warning, thrust the glowing tip of the cigarette against his cheek.

Carson swore savagely. With a powerful whirling movement of his big body, he swung the feet of his guards clear off the floor. The shorter, burlier Brady went into action, the oaths coming hot and fast, and for a minute the major's neat office looked and sounded like six pounds of lean beef thrown into the middle of a cage of lions.

Then more guards barged in with loaded,

leveled pistols. Brady reeled from a blow on the head and Carson looked into several black gun muzzles.

"No good, Pete," he said, breathing hard. "They've got us—for now."

"There will be more—very much more," the major said. He bowed low to the prisoners, grinned and hissed, with buck teeth showing.

"The snake gives warning before he strikes," Brady said, and haw-hawed at his own joke.

They were led out and hurled into an underground room, black as pitch and full of dampness. Groping their way, they found some moldy straw in a corner of the dirt floor, and sat down with their backs to the wall. They were silent for a moment. Then—

"Sir, Mr. Uchida waits without."

Brady chuckled. So did Carson as he laid an arm across the sergeant's powerful shoulders. It took courage to face the enemy with a quip and a smile.

Suddenly Carson remembered something. "Herd the Nip so-and-so in here, where I can kill him."

Well, they couldn't lure Uchida inside but maybe they could get the guard by some ruse or other. That would mean a pistol at least, and maybe a rifle. Carson leaned close to his friend, spoke softly.

"Pete, I've got an idea."

"Yeah? We can use one. Let's have it . . ."

The hours went by and the sun finally lowered behind the jungle wall. Night lay over the forest and over the drome of Tamao Uchida.

It must have been about ten o'clock when a commotion broke out within the cell.

Not much noise, but a lot of violent action, big bodies threshing around, the sound of blows, low-voiced and savage curses, and groans.

The guard stood pop-eyed, his ears glued to the wood. He looked wildly along the dark passageway, saw no help anywhere, spotted a huge, bright-bladed machete, used for brush-cutting, that someone had left there. He started to pick it up, then he heard more blows and finally a body sliding against the door and dropping to the ground with a thud.

Drawing his pistol, he hastened to unlock the door, prepared to see to it that these crazy Americans did not kill each other and cheat the major of his fun.

The thing that came out of the prison cell and exploded in his face might have been a six-inch shell, but it wasn't. It was the large, speedy fist of one Captain Bill Carson, and the effect it had on the guard was something out of this world. He went down, and Carson had his pistol.

The Yank clipped the prone man expertly behind the ear with the butt, just to make sure, and then both men were running. Brady snatched up the machete as he passed, and grunted with fierce satisfaction as he tested the keen blade with his thumb.

Most of the drome had gone to bed, but under the trees in front of the hangars men were still working on several ships lined up there—Zeros and Mitsubishi bombers.

The Americans knew where the operations office was. They thought—they fervently hoped—that the major was one disposed to take his job seriously and work late. When they came close, edging their way along behind the hangars, they saw through the window that they were right.

Brady nudged Carson, and the two men grinned as they peeped through the window. Brady laid a desperate finger on his upper lip to cut off a threatened sneeze. Successful, he took a firmer grip on the machete, and looked up at the captain. Carson nodded and, with pistol fisted, moved around the building toward the door.

Uchida stiffened at the voice from the doorway.

"Just one small yip, Mister, and you get it."

The major's eyes darted frantically in every direction as the two advanced toward him.

"On your legs, guy," Carson ordered. "You're going with us, you dirty little rat—and what you did in San Pedro will get you a date with the firing squad. Get up—fast!"

Uchida's eyes went past Carson to the rear corner of the room, but Carson thought it was a trick, and he didn't turn. Brady did, and let drive with his free left fist, but not in time to stop the pistol butt of the adjutant. It glanced off Carson's skull and bells rang, lights whirled in his head. He had a flash glimpse of Uchida's arm darting toward an open desk drawer, and then he was on the floor, taking a slow count of about six.

When his eyes focused again, he was

halfway out the door, still gripping the pistol. Brady had him by the arm, and was growling something in his ear.

"Snap out of it, Bill. No time for monkey business. Come on!"

Carson shook his head, blinked.

"I'm okay," he said. "But, dang it, we can't stop now for Uchida."

They slipped along behind the hangars, saw a Mitsubishi being tuned up in front of one. They moved fast, Brady still clinging to his machete. But he didn't need to swing it. The pistol in Carson's big fist was enough for the three unsuspecting mechanics. They stared, slack-jawed, then slowly lifted their hands.

They kept them lifted while Brady got into the co-pilot's seat. He tossed the machete on the floor and took Carson's

pistol while the captain slid into the pilot's seat.

Taking off, with shots whanging after them and nothing but a few wavering oil flares at the end of the field to guide them, was a ticklish business, but Carson made it.

"Short run to our own drome," he exulted. "No chance they can catch us." He laid a hand tenderly on his scalp. "Jeepers, that cuss nearly brained me. What the devil happened after I got slugged, Pete? What about Uchida?"

"I floored the adjutant and snatched his gun," Brady said. "Had Uchida covered, but he went for his own gun regardless."

"Things were happening so fast he kind of lost his head, I reckon," Carson mused.

"Kind of lost it!" Brady snorted. He jerked a thumb at the bloody machete on the floor. "Sir, Mr. Uchida waits—*without!*"

HOT PILOT

By DANIEL PRESCOTT

There's no room for personal rivalries when the old man with the whiskers sends out a call for flying men!

LIEUTENANT JAKE STALLINGS took a good look around at the air above Newton Field, saw that his trainer was all by itself, and spoke into the inter-com.

"Do some figure eights to the right," he said to the training cadet in the front seat. "And watch your nose. Go ahead."

He saw the cadet stiffen slightly, and he could clearly picture the expression of mild surprise on the kid's face. It was always the same.

Newton Field was the formation and combat school. When the fledglings arrived there they had gone through eighty percent of their training. Newton Field was the last step to a pair of silver wings and assignment to active duty on one of the dozen or more fighting fronts of the world.

They came there all set to fly skin-tight formation, and to put every burst through the eye of a needle. As a result, to be taken up in a two-seater trainer and ordered to do some simple figure eights always jarred them.

But that was exactly the idea. To take the cocky lads down a peg or two, and make them realize they hadn't earned their wings . . . yet. And it also made it possible for their Newton instructor to get a line on what kind of pilots they were—hot or cold.

"Yes, sir," finally came the faint reply over the inter-com.

A few seconds later the trainer was banked over and around in the first turn of the first figure eight. Stallings paid attention for awhile, until he saw that the kid up front knew his stuff. Then he relaxed a bit and let his thoughts wander.

They didn't wander far. In fact they went straight to the same old mountain of misery he had been struggling up against for the last five months.

In short, to the fact that he was an instructor at Newton Field, instead of a fighting pilot in Australia, or Egypt, or England, or some place else.

Just a year ago he had won his wings. It had been a great day for him. Pearl

Harbor hadn't happened then, but that something was in the air was very certain. You could smell it, and almost feel it.

Then, bang! The Jap stab in the back! Uncle Sam rolled up his sleeves and gave the nod to his steel-clawed eagles. But not all of them received the nod.

Jake Stallings had been one of those disappointed few. And bitterly disappointed they were, because instead of being sent out to gamble their all with the little brown rats of Nippon, they had been sent to the various flight-training schools throughout the country to help speed up the turning out of hundreds of thousands of crack pilots the old man with the whiskers would be needing in the future.

"Five months!" he grated softly to himself. "Five months of checking kids through, and seeing them go away to the real thing. Just a factory hand, that's me. I work in a pilot factory . . . on piece work!"

With that off his chest he automatically returned his attention to the kid up front. Bitter as he was at his own luck, there was a part of him that refused to let the other fellow down. And in this case it was the kid in the front seat.

It was his right to receive the best flight training in the world. And it was Jake Stallings' job, and that of every other instructor, to see that he got it. Yet, sometimes—

"Okay!" he snapped into the inter-com. "Give me a couple of rolls, and half one off a loop. Then take us down."

Some ten minutes or so later, Stallings climbed down onto the tarmac and un-snapped his helmet strap.

"That's all," he said to the cadet. "Your name will be posted on the cadet flight board for your next spell. Keep your eye on it."

Stallings saw the inevitable question in the kid's eyes, but he turned his back and walked over to the instructors' mess. The same thing again!

"Did I do all right, sir? I got a thumbs up on that bit?"

Well, it was good to let them wonder. Make them keep their eye on the ball, and their nose down out of the blue. He forgot the cadet and pushed in through the mess door.

Ball, Morrison, and Wilson were there, sprawled in chairs and nursing Pepsi-Colas. Stallings went over to the machine in the corner, fed it a nickel, and got a bottle for

himself. He wished it was beer, but he was on flight duty until six. The Pepsi-Cola would have to do.

"Hear the news, Jake?" Ball grunted. "A fresh load of hash tonight. Sixty-five of them."

"So what?" Stallings growled and dropped into the next chair. "Sixty-five, or a thousand and sixty-five! What does it matter? It's all the same. Weed out a couple of the bad ones, and send the rest on through . . . to win medals!"

"Ah, now I get it!" Morrison chuckled. "Old Hard-hearted Jake wants to win a medal. He doesn't want to be an instructor at all."

"All those present who want to instruct please raise their right hands," Stallings shot at him, and grinned. "I thought so. Well, that's—"

"I do!" Wilson called out and straightened his massive shoulders. "Active combat and medals? What are they? Nothing! But to instruct? To take sweet innocent fledglings and make them into two-fisted fighting eagles that thunder out at dawn? Ah, where is there a satisfaction of the soul to top that glorious kind of duty? Where—"

"Here!" Ball roared and slung the pillow. Wilson ducked, but too late. Besides, his big body was delicately balanced on the edge of the chair. He and the chair went over with a crash, and his half emptied bottle went out flying. He picked himself up and sighed.

"I was wrong," he groaned. "Instructing is too dangerous. And besides, you tramps ain't got no beauty of devotion. A nickel for a fresh Pepsi-Cola from you, Mister Ball, or you will instruct no more!"

"It's almost worth it," Ball grunted, and tossed the big fellow a nickel.

There was a bit more kidding and horsing around, and then everything was strictly Army Air Forces. Colonel Deak, commandant of the school, came in through the door. He returned the attention salute and waved them back to their chairs.

"Here's the list of the new bunch arriving tonight," he said. "I've divided them among you, as usual. Here're your individual lists. Speed things up a little, if you can, but not to the detriment of the student, of course. And, Stallings, I'd like to talk with you a moment outside."

The Commandant gave each of them a list of names, then went out the door. Stallings absently stuffed his in his pocket and

followed him out. When they were in the sunshine the colonel turned and fixed him with a steady eye.

"Jack it up a little, Stallings," he said gently but firmly. "None of us here like our jobs, but that's our tough luck. There'll still be our jobs. Been watching you, and checking your student reports. Not so good. Get your heart into it. Make yourself do it. Falling down on the job won't get you a transfer to an active service unit. It'll just get you grounded, and a desk job. Get tough again, Stallings. Make these kids do their stuff. It's for their own good. That's all. Get in there and pitch. You're the best instructor on the field when you want to be!"

The colonel nodded, smiled faintly, and walked away. Jake Stallings swallowed hard, closed his eyes tight, and stood perfectly motionless.

"Maybe I'd like a desk job!" he grated softly through clenched teeth. "Maybe I'd love it—as a change from *this!*"

Eventually the burning went out of his face and chest. He swung back into the mess and plopped down in his chair. The others gave him a glance, but said nothing.

He sipped his drink, then pulled the list from his pocket. It contained six names. He ran his eyes down the list to the last name, then suddenly whipped it back to the second name. It was *Manners, Jefferson Maitland*.

He stared hard at the name, gave a little shake of his head, and stared again. Jeff Manners? It couldn't be. But why couldn't it? And it probably was. Fate, of course, would fix it that way.

Jefferson Maitland Manners. Their feud was an old one. It went way back to baby-carriage days. Their nurses out wheeling them had met in the park. They had been plunked down on the grass to coo at each other while the nurses chewed the fat.

But they hadn't cooed to each other. Jeff Manners intentionally or otherwise had smacked him with his rattle. Jake's nurse had told him about it, some years later, when he and Manners were having a daily fight about something or other.

But that's the way it had gone on, and on. Always scrapping, always rivals at everything. And every single time, whether it was a sixty-foot race in school, or a fist fight out behind the school, Jeff Manners had always come out on top by a hair.

Never had they been friends, even in college. And never had Stallings been able

to pull Manners down a peg. Not even close to once. Jeff Manners!

"Well, well, the young man is smiling again!" Morrison's voice cut into his thoughts. "Good news, Jake?"

He looked up, grinned, and tapped his list of students.

"The best," he said. "Like it says in books, 'every cloud has a silver lining.' This one's good. Who'll have a drink on me?"

At dawn the next day, six eager-eyed cadet students grouped themselves in front of Jake Stallings on the tarmac and listened to the usual arrival pep-talk.

All of them were eager-eyed, but the lips of one of them, a tall perfectly built lad with the kind of blond hair girls love to run their fingers through, were curled back at the corners in a faint grin. Jake knew the grin was there, but he paid no attention. He was grinning a little himself—inside.

"Okay, I'll give you each a little test hop," he finally said. "Cadet Manners, get in that plane over there. The front pit. The rest of you stick around."

Manners was buckling on his parachute when Stallings reached the plane. The tall blond student was grinning broadly, now, and there were dancing lights in his eyes.

"Well, well, what do you know!" he chuckled. "So Jake Stallings is to teach me things, huh? The big moment for you, hey, kid?"

Stallings looked at him hard and long.

"Right!" he presently said. "A lot of things, Manners. And the first is to say, sir, to an officer. Now, get in that ship, and keep your mouth shut!"

Manners stiffened and looked like he was going to laugh out loud. But, he didn't. He had absorbed enough of Air Force training not to be a fool. Besides, he also saw something in Jake Stallings' eyes.

So he wiped the grin from his face, and climbed into the front pit. Stallings got in back and took the two-seater up into the air. He pushed it away from the field a bit, then spoke in the inter-com.

"Do a few figure eights to the right," he ordered.

As usual Manners sat up straight. But he also spoke.

"What?" he cried. "Figure eights? What are you going to do, get me all set for solo?"

"Shut that trap!" Stallings barked. "Figure eights, and make them good."

The cadet student didn't reply to that.

Instead he whipped the plane through a fast but smooth figure eight. Stallings felt no surprise at the nice hot-pilot flying. He knew that Manners would be like that.

"Another one!" he barked. "And do it my way, or we go down and land. I said to the right, not the left!"

"Oh, sorry. . . . Sir!"

The plane figure-eighted to the right and kept on going. The banks were flawless, and the recovery to even keel was equally so. Stallings nodded his head in approval in spite of how he felt toward Manners personally.

Jeff was a hot pilot, and the kind that Uncle Sam could do with—plenty. That is, unless Jeff Manners couldn't stop being Jeff Manners.

"All right, take it through a few jumps," he ordered the cadet. "Don't show off. Show me what you can do."

For the next fifteen minutes Manners did everything with the trainer except get out and run up and down the wings. It was good flying, but it was also a little forced. Stallings knew that his cradle days rival was shooting the works to prove he was still top man. He was certain of that a moment later when Manners' voice came over the inter-com:

"Mind showing me some of your stuff . . . sir?"

"Take us down and land!" Stallings shot back at him. "And you're grounded for two days, Manners. You had your warning! Students are to keep their mouths shut except in cases of emergencies."

Manners made no reply. He took over the controls again, and thundered down to an express-train landing. Rather, a bolt of lightning landing. There was sullen rage on his face when he climbed out. Stallings looked at him hard-eyed.

"Three days, not two, Manners," he said in a flat voice. "We don't pay off on hot-headed show-offs. Think it over."

"I have," Manners said tight lipped. "I think I get the picture, Lieutenant. But you'll not ride me and keep me from my wings. Not in a hundred years. I've always beaten you—at anything."

Had there been anybody but himself within ear-shot Stallings might have done something about that crack. Instead, he stepped close to Manners and touched him lightly on the chest with the tip of a finger.

"Show me, and you'll get your wings," he said evenly. "But, we're tough at this school.

That's our job. Keep it in mind—and be smart."

And at that moment, Jake Stallings became the toughest instructor who ever tore the skin off a student. He was tough with all of the cadets, but with Jeff Manners he was a fire-spitting demon with wings.

He rode the student, and rode him hard. He kept right on his neck, and made his life miserable. But not once did Stallings overstep himself.

He didn't give Manners a single break, yet at the same time he did absolutely nothing to push the cadet student toward the wash-out sign.

For the first few days Manners, so used to being the top man, fought back open and furiously. But after a while he saw the size of the stone wall he was bucking, and hid his rage. But it was there just the same, ready to fly up at an instant's notice.

Unknown to Manners, however, he swiftly developed into one of the finest pilots ever to come to Newton Field. Stallings alone realized that, and in the still quiet hours of the night it made him toss and turn in his bunk.

History was repeating itself! Jeff Manners was good, the very best. He would get his wings and within six months he'd probably be doing things that got front-page space in the war news.

And Jake Stallings would be second place, as usual. He'd still be passing cadet students through Newton Field. It wasn't right. It was rank injustice.

He almost caught himself actually hating the perfect-in-everything Jeff Manners, and wondering what he could do to have Manners flunk at Newton, and be pushed back down the line. And when he caught himself thinking those things he hated his own guts.

And then came the day when Stallings was to check-out Manners on close-formation maneuvering. By then the pair were chunks of ice toward each other, and Manners spoke only when spoken to. But just before they walked out to the two waiting P-40s, Manners turned and looked at Stallings.

"Have I permission to say something, Lieutenant?" he asked with grating stiffness.

"Go ahead," Stallings replied. "What is it?"

"Just this!" the cadet student cut at him. "I know you've done everything possible to get me pushed down from here. But you haven't been able to, and I'll never let you,

if I can possibly help it. But if it does happen, remember this! I could always top you in anything, Stallings. *And I still can!*"

Stallings slowly let the air out of his lungs and jerked a thumb at the planes.

"Get in," he said quietly.

Manners suddenly realized in that moment you can't move a stone wall with words. His good-looking face went a brilliant red, and he unconsciously bunched his hands into two rock hard fists. Just as suddenly he relaxed and climbed into his pit.

"Yes, sir!" he said tight lipped. "And how!"

Stallings climbed into his own P-40, checked the instruments and controls, and then glanced over at Manners. The cadet student was all set, and his nod was curt and icy cold. Stallings raised his hand in signal, and then opened his throttle. Manners did the same, and the two planes went whanging off the field's surface as though tied together. Holding his ship steady Stallings nosed up for altitude and watched Manners out the corner of his eye. What he saw made his heart skip half a beat, and also caused anger to simmer in his chest.

The tall, blond cadet student was flying skin-tight formation. He was on Stallings' left rear, and his right wingtip was within an inch of brushing the trailing edge of Stallings' left wing. It was skin-tight, and entirely close.

Cold common sense was with Stallings, and he caught Manners' eye and waved for him to ease off a little. He could have used the radio, but he didn't. There'd be ears listening in down at Field Operations, and what happened up here in the air was something strictly personal between Manners and himself.

So he waved the student off, and steeled himself when he saw the triumphant smirk on the other's face, as he pulled away a little, but not too much. He nodded his head to tell Manners that was okay, and then signalled for a right turn.

As he went around, he saw Manners cut back in to his original position, and his heart came up in his throat. But there wasn't anything to worry about. Manners held his plane steady as a rock, and both ships went around as one.

Just the same, anger flared up high in Stallings, and he was tempted to snap orders over the radio. But he checked himself, and a sense of the old rivalry flowed through him.

If Manners wanted to show how much better he was, okay—let him try it. If Manners could take this sort of tight flying, so could he. And *how* he could. Okay, Manners! I'll lead, and you follow—if you can.

For the next twenty minutes, Stallings led the way all over the sky, and Manners stuck to him like a fly to a piece of fly paper. It was beautiful flying, but every second of the time Stallings' heart was jammed up against his back teeth. If anything should happen! If either of them should cut in a hair too close, and tangle ships—

And suddenly it did happen!

Stallings signalled for a left turn and started to bank over. He saw Manners' grim, tight-lipped delay a split second before he started the turn. It was an open challenge to Stallings to make it closer than ever, or "give air" and pull away.

But there was no time for the challenge to be accepted. Manners was watching Stallings' face and not his plane. As a result the cadet student didn't have room in which to make the turn. Stallings saw that whirling propeller chewing into his left wing as he slammed the stick over in a frantic effort to pull away. But too late.

There was a grinding, and a ripping, and a sky-shattering metallic snarl. Instinctively Stallings snapped off his ignition and hauled the stick back into his belly. Manners must have done the same thing, for the two planes locked together rose up to point toward the sky.

Stallings twisted his head to the left as he unsnapped his safety harness and climbed up onto the seat. He was just in time to see Manners dive away from the wreckage and into the clear. Then he was clear of it, himself, and tumbling headlong down through space.

He yanked his rip-cord ring and started floating down under the silk. He saw Manners floating down a mile to his left. He saw the cadet student touch ground safely, and "trip" his chute. A few moments later, he was safely on solid ground, himself.

That noon Stallings and Manners stood before Colonel Deak in the Commandant's field office. The colonel's face was grim and tight, and for a couple of moments he stared silently at the instructor and student.

"Two planes lost!" he suddenly snapped. "That's two too many. The Field Officer says you were flying pretty close formation.

Did you order that, Lieutenant Stallings? And exactly what caused that collision?"

Jake Stallings didn't answer for a moment. He shot a swift look at Manners. Their eyes met and anger started smoldering in Stallings'. The flash look in Manners' eyes was the same as words.

"Go ahead, Stallings! Your big moment! Here's your perfect chance to have me busted out! Go ahead! It's the only way you can ever win!"

In that split second, a million thoughts whipped through Jake Stallings' brain. If he told the truth; how Manners had refused to keep off, how he had deliberately held back on that last turn, the cadet student would be washed out, and sent back.

Yes, and it might be a darn good lesson for Manners. But if he lied, Manners would go on and get his wings. And some day soon there'd be a few less Jap and Nazi pilots to spill death around a civilized world.

Yet if he *did* lie, one Lieutenant Jeff Stallings would be sunk also. To make a student fly that close, and then fly into him? Well, the Army Air Forces didn't want that kind of a pilot for *any* kind of job.

"I ordered the close formation, Colonel," he heard his own lips saying. "And the crash was my fault. I didn't give Manners time enough to get the signal. I banked too soon,

and he couldn't help ramming me. That's the way it all was."

"I see," Colonel Deak said slowly. Then, nodding at Manners, "That's all. Dismissed. You can return to flying duty."

Stallings caught the look of happy bewilderment in Jeff Manners' eyes as the cadet student stumbled out the door. Then he was conscious of Colonel Deak's eyes upon him.

"I was watching through glasses, Stallings," he said. "I saw you wave him off. I saw him keep coming in close. He lagged back to make it closer and rammed you. I've also seen the ice between you since Manners arrived. I don't care to know about that. But—but I would like to know why you lied to me to save his neck. Why?"

Jake Stallings licked his dry lips and shrugged.

"It's hard to say, sir," he mumbled. "Maybe—well, maybe it's because hot pilots are needed out there, regardless. And he's a hot pilot."

"And you're not so cold yourself, Stallings," the colonel murmured and grinned. "And—well, you've been at this job quite a spell. Yes. Maybe you've earned a chance to go out there, too. I'll see what I can do about that, if you like?"

Jake Stallings didn't have to tell him. It was spread all over his face.

PILOT'S QUIZ

OKAY, kiwis and cloud-busters, here are ten more questions to test your air knowledge. Each correct answer counts 10%, and you may consider yourself a full-fledged "peelot" if you rate 60% or over. If you get 80% or over, you're exceptional. Now get going—the answers are on Page 49 if you **MUST** look!

1. What are the full names of four of the most famous World War II Curtis Hawk fighter planes?
2. How did the power of the first Wright airplane built in 1903 compare with the power of Wright motors in the new 1943 Lockheed and Martin planes?
3. Name ten American Aircraft Carriers now in service.
4. What type motor is used in the Waco CG-4A aircraft?
5. How many different countries have already experimented with helicopters?
6. Did military planes carry machine-guns in 1912?
7. When did rotating gun mounts come into use?
8. What is the Ferry Command Loft?
9. What is the WTS?
10. How many blades are now being used in aircraft propellers?

THE REAL HERO

By **NORMAN A. DANIELS**

America may lose battles—but, as fighter pilot Joe Craig found out, when she can produce mechanics who are as resourceful as Lee Dennison, she can't stay beaten!

"THE orders," Colonel Walker said firmly, "are that we leave at once."

"Leave?" Lieutenant Joe Craig was at attention with the twenty-odd men who manned the four Boeing Flying Fortresses and the single Curtiss P-40 which were poised behind them for the take-off.

"I said leave, Lieutenant," Colonel Walker repeated. "Oh, I know how you gentlemen feel. The rest of you didn't speak, but I know what you are thinking."

"May I speak again, sir?" Craig asked.

Colonel Walker inclined his head.

"May I ask why we are forced to leave Java when it is practically overrun with Japs now, sir?"

"I'll tell you, Lieutenant. I meant to tell all of you, anyway. As you may have heard, all Flying Fortresses except these in our squadron, departed from Java some time ago. Why? For the simple reason that there was no fighter protection, and Flying Fortresses are as vulnerable as broken-winged ducks the moment they land for refueling."

"Yes, that's true, Lieutenant, but they may not arrive for days, and by the time they do come, our squadron will have been wiped out. All of us here know the vast distances from the United States—how it has been so impossible to get help here quickly enough. It will arrive and not so long from now. When it does, we shall return."

"Return?" Craig blurted.

Walker smiled.

"Lieutenant Craig, you are as impulsive on the ground as you are in the air. Yes, I said return. We're not flying far away and you'll pilot that precious P-Forty of yours. Now are there any more questions?"

No one spoke. Colonel Walker gave a signal, and mechanics started the motors of the great planes. Walker moved closer to his men so they could hear him.

"Fortunately, there is a small island, one of the Solomon Group, just east of New Guinea. It was secretly developed by United States Commercial Air Lines as an emer-

gency base on the route to Australia, which was pioneered only a short time before hostilities broke out. It has a good landing field, and we doubt the Japs know anything about it. We can lay up there temporarily. That's all, gentlemen. We take off within the next ten minutes."

Lieutenant Craig did some quick mental mathematics. The P-40 had a range of seven hundred miles. That gave him a slight edge over the distance to the Solomons.

He strapped on his chute securely and fell into step with the pilots, radio operators and other crew members of the Flying Fortresses. They'd seen action, those vast, deadly planes. Not one remained unmarked by enemy bullets. They'd sunk Jap transports, two cruisers, three destroyers and a number of small ships in less than a week.

Java was all but fallen. General Hein Ter Poorten and his valiant Dutch troops, along with Australians, British and Americans, were holding off complete domination of the island against terrific odds. The Flying Fortresses were no longer of much avail against the Jap air concentrations.

Colonel Walker was right. It was best to move to a secret base and, from there, harry the Japs as much as possible and yet keep this small squadron intact.

Craig climbed into the P-40, the single-seat, all-metal, low-wing fighter which ran rings around Jap craft. Her Allison engine was purring smoothly. Fuel tanks were full, guns ready for action.

The big Boeings took off first and roared for altitude. Their ceiling was far beyond that which the P-40 could hope to attain, but it was Craig's job to act as protective escort and scout combined.

The still-smoking ruins of a blasted city were Craig's last grim good-by from Java. They flew out over the sea toward New Guinea. This was definitely enemy territory now. They were even ensconced on New Guinea, ready to pounce upon Australia.

There was no lingering sense of defeat in Lieutenant Craig's heart. He understood how impossible it had been for help to arrive in time. He knew, too, what it was like to fight against overwhelming odds—to dive headlong into Jap formations which outnumbered him ten to one. They were smart fighters, those yellow, buck-toothed sons of Nippon, men without an iota of mercy. Craig had seen three Jap planes dive on a parachuting American pilot and riddle him with machine-gun bullets.

Then, faint in the distance, he saw the outlines of New Guinea. They were flying around the island, hoping to keep out of sight of any possible Jap patrols. Nothing happened, and the trip began to grow monotonous. Craig's fuel supply wasn't too good either.

His radio crackled.

"Calling Lieutenant Craig. Come in, Craig."

It was Colonel Walker calling from his Flying Fortress.

"Craig, sir. You're coming in clear."

"Good. We're almost there. In ten minutes we'll be down to see you. Keep a sharp eye out. There's a possibility the Japs may have raided the island already. You're to go down for a look."

"Right," Craig answered, and swung his P-40 into a sharp bank. He rode gracefully toward the sea, checked his maps and knew exactly where that tiny island was located. It was late afternoon now, hot as only the region around the equator can be.

Craig saw the tiny island loom up, saw the clean, level stretches of the air field and reached for his radio switch. His hand paused. In the distance, and coming out of the west, were a number of tiny specks. Craig nosed up at full throttle.

Friendly planes—hardly, in this part of the Pacific. Undoubtedly they'd spotted him, but had they seen the Flying Fortress high above? Craig didn't know. He snapped on the radio switch.

"Calling Colonel Walker. Craig, calling Colonel Walker. Come in, Skipper."

"Yes, Craig." Walker's voice was tense. "We've seen them, too. At least a dozen of the beggars. Light bombers and a few fighters. This is your party, Craig."

"Thank you, sir. I'll take them on. I'll cover your escape the best I can."

"We can't help you, Craig. It's impossible. These Flying Fortresses compose the very few left around these parts. We're heading

for Samoa. You can't make it with your fuel supply. If necessary, land and hide. We'll be back if it's humanly possible. Good luck, Craig."

"Thank you, sir," Craig answered grimly. "I'll give them a taste of American steel—free, this time."

Craig pointed the nose of his plane straight toward the advancing enemy squadron. He felt no sense of having been let down. As a fighter pilot, his duty was to protect the bombers. If the sacrifice of his life saved those ships and their crews, it would be well worth it. Craig's face was grim, his eyes narrow. He thought of those Jap pilots machine-gunning that parachuting Yank.

Craig didn't have to acquire any larger amount of hatred for these yellow-skinned killers. He'd seen enough to make his hate reach a top peak.

He'd been spotted. The Jap force was gaining altitude for a quick dive upon him. The island was well to the south by now. Craig gasped suddenly because the light enemy bombers veered off. They were heading for the island—to blast it.

Craig counted swiftly then the six enemy fighters he'd have to contend with. They'd expect him to turn tail and run for it. With full fuel tanks, he could have outstripped them, although such an idea never entered his head, anyway.

Craig banked sharply and roared toward the island to intercept the bombers. If he could get in a couple of good licks there before the enemy fighters caught up with him, so much the better.

He rose to eight thousand feet and gave her the gun. Quickly now, the light bombers took shape. They were 97's, two-seated low-wing monoplanes. It was easy to recognize them by their pointed noses and fixed, streamlined landing gear.

They were coming in fast, aware of his presence and intent on dropping their eggs before he forced them into a dogfight. But the P-40 had a big edge in speed over these craft. The fighters were well behind. Craig was satisfied with conditions.

Not that he hoped to come out of this alive—that thought had no place in his scheme of things. This was a battle to the finish. He nosed down slightly and started a steep turn to the right to get on their tails. He did another sharp right-hand turn and saw the last Jap plane come into the sights of his guns.

Craig pressed the firing button. The Jap in the rear seat was throwing up some death, too, but he never had much of a chance. Craig's first burst got the rear gunner and silenced him. The stream of steel swept over the plane from stern to stem. It threw off a great column of black smoke and began diving toward the sea.

Craig was pouncing on another one before the first plane even started to dive. His gun racked this ship and disposed of it in five seconds. He twisted his head. The fighters were coming up fast. They were Nakajima AN-1's, fast, capable craft.

Craig paid no further attention to them. Bombers were his dish and he meant to serve himself up plenty before they finally got him. His guns blasted again. He felt the P-40 rock as a fusillade lashed it. One of the light bombers had nosed down to attack from above.

Craig did a half-roll and roared toward the clouds this time. The bomber, coming down to attack, pulled out of its dive and did a stall turn. Craig was waiting for that. His blast caught the ship squarely in the middle, and her bomb cargo must have blown up. The ship flew into splinters.

Below him, the other bombers were now dumping their eggs on the island landing field. Craig could see the explosions mushroom like huge, opening flowers. He hurled a burst at one bomber. It started to perform some circus stunts to avoid him, but he'd clipped it a little. A small amount of smoke was coming from its engine and Craig was able to follow its maneuvers easily.

He flew headlong at this plane, holding his fire until it was impossible to miss. The Jap fighters would be coming down on him at any moment now, and his ammunition wasn't much better than his fuel supply.

The Jap pilot must have thought that Craig's guns were empty, that he was trying a mad suicide act, because the Jap started to wiggle his plane wildly. Craig could actually see the helmeted, leering face of the Jap when his guns cut loose. That face disappeared in a crimson smear. The bomber fluttered like a stricken butterfly. More smoke poured out of her engine. The last he saw of it, the plane was streaking for the sea.

Then hell broke loose. There seemed to be Nakajima fighters all around him. The air was thick with the death-sputtering ships. The P-40 shuddered violently under the impact of steel. Craig selected one at random and opened fire at 300 yards. The Jap pilot was

tricky and he escaped the first blast. Craig kept on until the distance was no more than fifty yards. The Jap pilots sensed death then. It came a split-second later. Craig knew that the pilot could never have realized what hit him.

His own engine began to throw off smoke. Then came the catastrophe. Those Jap fighters were hurling shells. One of them hit his reserve gas tank, on which he had been running for many minutes now. It was set afire. Flames entered the cockpit.

Craig knew this was the finish. But he'd downed his share of enemy craft. They'd reached their objective, blasted the landing field into uselessness and probably killed almost everyone on the small island, but they did not get those Flying Fortresses.

Craig still had a few seconds of power left in his engine, and he climbed as fast as he could. When he knew such maneuvering was no longer possible, he turned the aircraft over on its back. He opened the hood and flame seared his face. In about three seconds the plane would bust to bits in midair.

With one hand, he released the harness and with the other, pushed the stick hard forward. Then he let go and went hurtling out of the plane. It spurred forward under the impetus of power still remaining, but no more than two seconds after Craig broke contact with the plane, it was shrouded by flames.

He opened his chute after a delayed drop of five thousand feet. That was risky, but those Jap fighters were diving at him, and he had to outspeed them on the way down.

The chute checked his drop. The Jap planes were still coming, but so was the ground. They'd hardly risk their necks to knock off one fool Yank pilot who didn't have a plane and who was landing on an island already inhabited only by death.

A few tracer bullets came winging his way, but they were just a gesture on the part of the Japs. The fighters had to level off or crash. Craig saw trees looming up and jerked the shroud lines to avoid them. He landed in a bush, which helped a little because it stopped the drag of the chute.

He cut the lines, scurried out of the bush and ran like mad for the better protection of jungle growths. The Japs were diving again, to strafe him.

He flung himself head first into a swamp. The mud and water closed around his body just as machine-gun bullets started to throw

up geysers in the swamp. Craig rolled over on his back, rubbed mud across his face and lay quietly.

The planes came back twice, then rose to join what was left of the bomber formation. Craig struggled out of the swamp, reeled over to dry land and dropped flat. He lay there for a long time, recovering from the shock of those few minutes of intense battle. It was nearly dark when he started to examine the island.

It wasn't much more than a coral reef, perhaps a couple of miles long and three-quarters of a mile broad. He headed for the flying field, hoping to find someone there.

Skirting the open area, he saw a small barracks levelled to the ground by those Jap bombs. He saw men in the wreckage, dead men! There were five of them. Craig groaned. It looked as though the entire population of the island had been wiped out in that blast.

The field itself was completely ruined. Nothing short of a small army of workers could eradicate those huge craters. They'd really given this place a pasting.

Craig started to walk toward a small shed, hoping it would contain food and water. He heard branches creak behind him. Turning, he saw two Japanese, dressed in fishermen's clothing. Both held sub-machine-guns.

"You will raise the hands please?" one of them smirked. "Very high."

Craig obeyed orders. He stood fast while the two approached him. He was quickly searched, and his service automatic taken from him. A machine-gun jabbed him in the ribs.

"Very good. Now you walk in front, please. We go to other side of island where we live. No tricks—death if you run away."

"Say," Craig asked, "what is this, anyhow? Where'd you two pop from?"

The spokesman showed all his teeth in a big grin.

"We Jap fishermen. We find island—see it being made into base. Fools who work here sink our ship, but we have taken radio off. We hide—send message and Jap airmen come. Shoot you down very quick, yes."

"Yes—but not before a few of your yellow brothers came down too. Or did you close your eyes when those bombers dropped?"

Craig was rewarded with a slap across the mouth for that. He shrugged and walked through some steaming jungle before he reached the south coast. The Japs had rigged

up a leanto. There was a radio under it, also clothes and food.

The Jap, who spoke English and kept his perpetual grin, indicated that Craig was to remain standing as he and his companion plopped themselves down on piled-up tarpaulins.

"There are other Americans coming, yes?" he asked.

"More than you or Hirohito, Hitler or Mussolini can handle," Craig answered.

His eyes roved around and saw a small building about a hundred yards to the left. It had no windows, and the narrow door was closed and padlocked from outside. He wondered what they'd be keeping there.

The Jap lit one of the cigarettes he'd taken from Craig.

"Ah, so," he nodded. "I think you are mistaken. Our leaders have said peace will be dictated by us—from your White House. Or perhaps you believe it will happen in the temple of the Sop of Heaven?"

"No. I'm sure it won't, you ugly little piece of yellow bluff. When peace is finally declared, there won't be enough left of Hirohito's place to sign a cigarette paper in. We'll blast it off the earth."

Craig was playing a desperate game. By antagonizing these two, he hoped to force one of them close enough so he might go into action. How, he didn't know and left circumstances to determine his moves. So long as he stood helpless and covered by their guns, he had no chance at all.

The Jap hurled his cigarette to the ground, muttered something to his companion, then rose. Gun leveled, he stepped up to Craig and put the muzzle of it against his stomach.

"Insolent puppy," he snarled. "For less than that, I have killed Americans. Like those who were in the barracks, for example. They insulted us as you have, but we got them. There were five, and we drugged their water. When the bombers came, they were in the barracks, tied up, and they knew that bombs would fall."

"Did you learn that trick from Hitler or is it one you cooked up in your own crude little mind? I wondered why those men hadn't fled when the raid started. I suppose your bombers even had orders to let go on the barracks?"

"Yes, of course. Now you will tell me what I wish to know. Is that clear? Talk or I shall begin shooting. Why were you sent to this island? Where did those Flying

Fortresses go? We saw them through our glasses."

"They'll be back," Craig promised, "but I won't tell you where they went."

The Jap stepped back and summoned his companion. He gave orders in Japanese and translated the gist of them for Craig's benefit.

"You will be taken to our prison camp. It is over there in that small shed. By day, the temperature reaches far above one hundred. You will roast and starve and scream for water. Just like the one who is there now. By tomorrow night you will talk, and should your bombers return before then, I shall kill you at once."

With a machine-gun against his back, Craig started walking toward the shed. He looked over his shoulder once and saw that the English-speaking Jap had disappeared, probably to estimate the damage to the field and make sure no Flying Fortress could possibly land.

The Jap who spoke no English was a stupid, cruel-looking baboon with short, bowed legs, a thick neck and, probably, thick brains. Craig could have hoped for nothing better than to be guarded by this man.

They were close to the shed now. The guard would have to reach into his pocket for a key while holding the sub-machine-gun with the other hand, and the weapon was clumsy in his grasp. Craig tensed as he came to a halt in front of the shed.

The Jap did exactly what Craig knew he'd have to do. He dug deep into a pocket. The machine-gun sagged just the slightest, and Craig went to work. One hand shot out, deflected the aim of the barrel while the other hand smashed at the Jap's chin. He pressed him against the wall, wound fingers around his throat and squeezed with all his strength.

The Jap did his best to get the gun into play, and when he found that was impossible, he gambled. He let go of the gun unexpectedly, reached like a flash for a knife slung to his hip and got it loose. The blade swept toward Craig in a curve meant to rip him from the stomach upwards.

Craig let go of the Jap's throat, both hands grasped the man's hair and he gave a tremendous yank. The Jap was lifted off his feet, the knife missed by an unhealthy margin, but it missed.

Before the Jap could bring the knife back into play, Craig walloped him in the mid-

riff, but the Jap could take it. Still clinging to the knife, he inserted a foot between Craig's legs and both of them dropped heavily to the ground. Craig reached out, gripped the Jap's knife hand and gave it a mighty twist. Bone cracked. The Jap screamed, and the knife fell to the ground.

As Craig reached for it, two astoundingly strong legs came out and clasped around his back. The Jap was trying some ju-jitsu. Craig felt those legs begin squeezing. In a moment or two they'd break his back. He swept the knife toward the Jap, felt the point of it sink into the man's flesh and those legs suddenly lose their strength. Craig drove the knife deeper, then jumped up.

The Jap lay very still. The blade had slipped between his ribs and entered his heart. Craig, breathing heavily, ran over and picked up the sub-machine-gun. He was none too soon because the English-speaking Jap was brought back by the yells of his mate.

The Jap opened fire. Steel smashed through the shed, and someone inside let out a corrosive curse. Craig dropped flat and yanked trigger. He aimed low and saw where the bullets were striking the ground. They marked his target almost as well as tracers. He lifted the muzzle, and the Jap took a full burst in the chest.

Craig ran to the one he'd stabbed, found keys in his pocket and unlocked the shed. A pale, emaciated American in torn overalls and jumper staggered out.

"By jumping Jehosophat!" he croaked. "A Yank! A Yank lieutenant. Brother, am I glad to see you."

"The feeling is mutual," Craig said. "I heard what happened here. Forced down a short time ago and ran into those two Japs."

"Yeah, it looks like you did run into 'em with a knife and a gun. Good work, pal. My name is Lee Dennison. I was a mechanic stationed on this forsaken island before the war started."

Craig offered his hand.

"I'm Craig, Air Corps. They told me I'd be starved and denied any water, so I presume you've had the same treatment. Follow me. They've left us enough food and water. Soon as we fill up, we'll talk about getting off the island."

Dennison gulped food and swallowed water until Craig had to stop him. Dennison leaned back on the pile of tarpaulin and grinned.

"I was hoping, not more than an hour ago, that one of those bombs would land

smack on my shed. Believe me, it's a lot better to die than let those monkeys get you."

"And you know what happened to the others?"

"Sure. They told me. Ten times they told me, but they didn't put me there. They figured I'd reached the radio they had in their crummy fishing boat. I did—but I couldn't work the blasted thing. So I sank the ship, but those yellow heathens swam out and saved the radio and the stuff you see here. They got me, too, and the rest of the boys."

"And they didn't kill you because they figured you'd call for help, is that it?"

"That's it, Lieutenant. I let 'em keep on thinking so. When those Boeings came over, the Japs nearly had a fit."

"Tell me something," Craig asked. "These two Japs apparently slipped up on the island. They were not fishermen. Don't let their outfits fool you. They drugged the water supply and captured all the men on the island. How come they didn't land you?"

Dennison grinned.

"I was over on the north end, developing a little pet of mine. You see, I'm just a grease monkey. I used to work for Igor Sikorsky, but when I figured war was going to bust loose, I tried to enlist as a pilot.

"I'm thirty-eight so the Air Corps said I'd make a good mechanic. Well—a guy has to do something for his country, so I took the job and right away they shipped me to this island. I was to help prepare it for an emergency landing and refueling base.

"I serviced a few commercial clipper ships. The last one took off about an hour before the Japs struck a knife in the back of Pearl Harbor. Jap plans nailed it cold. The plane is sitting in the middle of an island about a hundred and fifty miles due north of here. The two Japs boasted about it."

Craig groaned.

"If we could only lay our hands on that ship."

"Maybe we can," Dennison said with a broad smile.

Craig looked at him sharply.

"You're feeling okay? Those Japs didn't drive you dippy? Look—just how do we reach an island a hundred and fifty miles away? By swimming?"

"Nope—by flying. I said I was working

on my pet when those yellow skunks walked in."

Craig jumped up.

"Don't tell me you've got a plane on this island!"

"Yeah—sort of. Come on. I'll let you look her over."

Dennison led the way, for more than a mile. Finally he waved a hand at what seemed to be a mass of thick brush.

"Nice camouflage, eh, partner? I did it myself. Grab one end of the mess and help me haul it away."

Craig didn't move.

"Dennison," he said slowly, "I think the heat has got you. A guy who builds a yacht in his cellar is no more a fool than you are. Why didn't you build a plane near a field? How can we take off? How can we even move the plane into any kind of position for a take-off? Those are trees all around us. This is a jungle forest."

"Wait," Dennison kept smiling, "and see."

Craig shrugged and helped to remove the camouflage. Then he stood very still and gaped.

What he saw seemed to be a plumber's nightmare. The oddest looking contraption he'd ever laid eyes on, it was merely an arrangement of pipes in the form of a crude cage. There was a motor in front of the cage and ahead of this, two pilots' seats.

Atop the whole business was a huge fan, like those which cooled old-fashioned saloons.

"A helicopter," Craig gasped. "Holy smokes, does that thing fly?"

"I said I worked for Sikorsky," Dennison said. "He rigged up one of these, and it flew like a charm. This one does too, and it's even better than Sikorsky's, because I took advantage of a lot of improvements he suggested. Pretty good for a greaseball, eh?"

"If it flies—yes." Craig's eyes were becoming alive in anticipation. "Look, Dennison, with this conglomeration of pipes, we can land near the clipper plane and maybe swipe it right from under their noses. But a hundred and fifty miles away—" his voice trailed off in resignation.

"She'll do better than that. What's more, she'll carry you and me and a couple of bombs if you wish. We got the bombs. They're buried on this island, part of a stock we hoped to build up before the Japs struck."

"What size bomb will she carry?"

"Well—with you and me and enough fuel

aboard to take us to the island and maybe back again if things go sour—I'd say a thousand-pounder."

"Then let's get her set. We'll rig something to drag the bomb here. I know how to set it up, but Dennison, I still think you're crazy. This nightmare will never fly."

The two men worked furiously then, using flaming pieces of wood for light after darkness really set in. When the plane was set, a thousand-pound bomb was nestled beneath the two seats. The fuel tank was about a third full. Denison swore he'd have to talk turkey to the plane to make it take off now and another ounce of weight would throw everything off balance.

While they worked, he explained things to Craig.

"You're the flier. Me, I'm just a grease monkey."

Craig parked himself in the seat and felt like an aviator of twenty years ago behind the controls of an old pusher-type plane. Dennison had explained well. Soon the huge fan was spinning smoothly. Craig yanked a lever, and the plane shot straight upwards. Craig's stomach did a nose dive, and he gulped. Dennison let out a yowl.

"Put her down, I forgot something. Put her down!"

When the plane was within three feet of the ground, Dennison jumped off, landed lightly and ran over to pick up the two sub-machine-guns which the Japs had used.

The wheels of the helicopter were not on the ground, but Dennison grabbed part of the pipe structure and hauled himself up. The plane dipped a little but took his off-balance weight easily.

Craig took her up to five hundred feet and felt as if he were sitting on top of a flag pole. He moved crude levers, and the plane started to travel forward.

"She won't do more than a hundred and fifty miles an hour with just me in her. With both of us and that big bomb, I'm afraid a hundred will be tops."

"Then we'll reach that island in an hour and a half," Craig grinned, "if we don't drop to the bottom of the sea. Dennison—this really is something."

"Aw, it's not so much. Spare time work did the job, and I had plenty of time. How's the war going, Craig?"

Craig told him, and Dennison swore luridly.

"They'll strike at Australia, I think, and very soon, too," Craig added. "We had tips they were bringing one of their biggest air-

craft carriers into these waters. We searched for it, but they have that craft well-hidden."

Neither spoke for some time, but the strange, unwieldy looking mass of pipes kept on flying. Whatever else was unique about this ship, the motor was superb. Craig did a complete stall in midair and then sent the craft slowly climbing for more altitude.

Soon they saw the lights of the island. The Japs felt so secure that they hadn't even blacked it out. Craig cocked his head.

"Listen—our motor isn't making all that noise. There are a flock of Jap planes around here."

"But it's too dark to see 'em," Dennison groaned. "There isn't even a star out."

"Which is mighty fortunate for us," Craig answered. "We'll keep going and trust to luck. If we spot the clipper plane, we'll maneuver, come straight down beside it and make a break. That's the only way. . . . Dennison, look! In that cove! It's a big ship. All her lights are on."

"An aircraft carrier!" Dennison cried. "Maybe it is the same one they are going to use on Australia."

"No question about it," Craig answered grimly. "Dennison, we can cripple that ship. Stall the Japs for weeks, but it might mean—well, bluntly—our finish, too."

"What do we want to do—live forever?" Dennison grumbled. "Go on—bust her one on the snoot."

Craig grinned happily. He rose to an estimated two thousand feet. The deck of the carrier was loaded with dive bombers, warming up. This was where the racket came from. Directly above the big expanse of deck, Craig brought the helicopter to a standstill in midair.

"Take over," he told Dennison. "Here's what to do. Bring her down directly above that middle funnel. We'll toss this bomb right down into her guts. We don't need bomb sights or anything else. This is like chucking a bowling ball right down the alley. We can't miss."

Dennison leaned over and operated the controls. The helicopter started down in a perfectly straight line. The stack grew larger and larger. Craig unhooked two of the wires which held the big bomb. She sagged, but the last wire held her in place.

Dennison brought that strange machine down to within a hundred yards of the yawning smokestack. They were unseen and unheard, because of the racket those planes were making.

"Take her up!" Craig yelled and yanked at the last wire. The bomb, already nosed down by its position, went into a perfect dive. The helicopter rose at a dizzy rate.

There was a tremendous roar below them. Flame and debris shot upwards. The helicopter gave a convulsive shudder from the concussion, but Dennison had taken her high enough to avoid the full force of it.

Land-based planes were taking off to hunt for this enemy which dropped a single bomb with such unerring marksmanship, but they made the mistake Craig hoped for. They were thinking of high-flying planes, with secret bomb sights, and the planes roared into the stratosphere.

Below, the carrier had already started to heel over. Flames were creeping along that part of the deck not under water.

Flying at a thousand feet, Craig sent the helicopter creeping away. Searchlights began to cut huge swathes in the sky, but they too were aimed for altitude.

"I guess," Dennison said, "we don't go for the clipper plane, eh, pal?"

"Can't be done. Not after the fuss we kicked up," Craig said. "I'm sorry, but I couldn't miss a chance to get that carrier."

"If you tried to miss it, I'd have slugged you and taken over," Dennison grinned.

"Where are we going—back to the island?"

"We've only enough fuel to reach it, but Dennison—with this thing we can raise the devil around these waters."

"Sure we can. There are bombs, fuel, oil and all kinds of junk on the island. I can even rig another of these nightmares. That's it—we'll stick around. You do the flying—the brain work. I'll do my usual grease monkey job. Say, Lieutenant, you might even come out of this a hero."

Craig looked at his companion.

"No, Dennison, not me. You may be a plain mechanic, but it's the likes of you who keep planes in the sky. Hero! You deserve the medals. You're the real hero."

AN AMERICAN SOLDIER TALKS

By EDGAR A. GUEST

Never mind the speeches long!
 Never mind the verbal flowers!
 At your duty be as strong
 As we try to be at ours.
 Free to come and free to go,
 Uncomplaining do your share.
 Keep the homes we used to know
 Happy, as if we were there.

Never mind the hero stuff!
 Medals go to very few.
 You at home be brave enough
 For the tasks that fall to you.
 What of us is asked we'll do—
 Foxhole grim or sky or sea!
 To the red, the white, the blue
 Just as faithful you must be.

Here's the way we see it all:
 Wars are fought by young and old,
 Youth to fight, perhaps to fall,
 Age the lines at home to hold.
 Never mind the pretty speech!
 Vain the victories at Rome,
 Vain our dead along the beach
 If they break through you at home.

If you look on us with pride,
 Give us back the pride you feel.
 We are fighting side by side,
 You with faith and we with steel.
 Back us till we reach our goal
 And our dreadful work is done!
 Back us, body, mind and soul
 Until freedom's war is won!

DO YOUR SHARE ! BUY WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

DOWN PAAGUMENE WAY

By LOUIS L'AMOUR

Fighting against desperate odds, flier Steve Cowan battles a half-caste Jap crew to foil a plot against an American convoy and protect a lovely actress!

CHAPTER I.

BLOOD-THIRSTY BRUTE.

STEVE COWAN leaned back against a packing case on the jetty at Paagumene Bay, New Caledonia, lazily watching the shipping. It was growing dark, and would soon be night.

Five ships were anchored in the harbor, all of them with cargoes for American troops. One, her freight discharged, was loading chrome from lighters.

The last ray of sunshine tipped the masts with transient gold. The freighter loading the chrome ore would sail tonight. In a few weeks she would be tying up in an American port.

Steve Cowan's eyes strayed to the amphibian, riding lightly on the darkening water. A little refitting and he could fly her home on his first furlough, since being assigned to Army Intelligence. She was a beautiful streamlined job, resembling the Grumman "Widgeon" but built to certain unusual specifications, laid down by Army designers. Because of that she was much faster and more maneuverable than any ship of her type. Moreover, she was armed like a fighter, and her bomb bays, so far unused, were always available.

A few changes to accommodate more fuel instead of the load of bombs she was built to carry, and she could be flown home.

Four years ago he had come out to the Pacific, and they had been four years of unceasing activity. Years that culminated in the Japanese invasion of the East Indies, ending his express and mail carrying business suddenly and dramatically. Since being commissioned, he had acted as a secret messenger and undercover agent for the Armed Forces of the United Nations.

But it would be good to be back in the States again, to walk down the streets, to look at pretty white girls once more.

A boat bumped alongside the jetty and two men clambered out.

"Put that idea out of your head, Meyer,"

said one. "You have just one thing to do. You get that chrome to the right place at the right time. You get it there, or else."

Abruptly, Steve Cowan stiffened. He knew that voice! Instinctively, he shrank down further behind the packing case.

"You don't understand, John!" the second man protested. "This job is a cinch. It won't interfere with the chrome deal. We can pick up that secret sailing list from the Burmese butler in Isola Mayne's place. With the Jap credentials we got, he'd turn the list over to us without batting an eye, and nobody'd be the wiser. And, John! The Japs would pay heavy to get it back. They got to have it for their subs!"

"Yeah?" John's voice was sneering. "You pull something like that, Meyer, and Koyama would cut your heart out. You don't know that Jap like I do. Try something and see what happens."

Something in the tone of that ugly, domineering voice rang a bell of memory in Steve Cowan's brain.

Mataga!

Recognition brought a start of dismay. Not twenty feet away, on the edge of the jetty, was a man sworn to kill Cowan on sight. And Cowan was unarmed.

Mataga was speaking again. "You'll do what you're told, see? All you have to worry about is getting this cargo of chrome to the Japs on time. If you muff it, the way you'll die won't be pretty. Koyama is plenty nasty."

"Besi John" Mataga in New Caledonia! Steve Cowan's eyes narrowed. The renegade from the waters around Singapore was not one to stop at anything. Deadly, brutal, and efficient, he had been working with Jap and Nazi Fifth Columnists for several years. When Singapore fell he went to Saigon. When Java succumbed, he appeared in Batavia. Now he was here, in New Caledonia!

As their footsteps receded down the jetty, Steve Cowan got to his feet. If Besi John

was here it meant something big was moving. Something infinitely more important than a shipload of vital war material. If he was working with Koyama it meant even more, for the Jap was a leader of the powerful and notoriously evil Black Dragon Society, which had many underground members among half-breed natives, in the South Seas. And "Meyer"? Could that be Peter Meyer? . . .

The eyes of M. Esteville were cool, amused, when Cowan interviewed him the next day. "But, M'sieu," he protested gently, "it cannot be! The vessel you speak of is the *Benton Harbor*, well known to us." He sighed gustily. "As you say, it is true her master is Peter Meyer, a native of Holland, but he is highly respected here. Your story, if you'll forgive me, is utterly preposterous!" "I know Mataga," Cowan persisted. "And I know what I heard."

Esteville shrugged. "Undoubtedly Mataga is a dangerous criminal. But here? I think not. It would be too dangerous. A fancied resemblance, no more."

"Bah!" Steve Cowan's voice was flat. "I know Mataga. I've reason to know him. Last night I heard him speaking. As to the other man, he may be your Captain Meyer, or he may not. I know Mataga is here and something's in the wind."

"We will investigate." Esteville stood up, plainly annoyed. "But you are mistaken. Nothing is wrong with that ship. As for your wild tale about shipping lists, that's fantastic. Even if such information could be obtained, there are no spies in Paagumene."

Cowan's eyes hardened. The man's indifference annoyed him. "I've told you. Now do something, or I will!"

Esteville's eyes blazed. "Remember, M'sieu, that New Caledonia still has a government! We are capable of handling our own affairs. Any interference from you will bring a protest to American officials—a protest too strong to be ignored."

Cowan turned on his heel and walked out. He could scarcely blame Esteville for being doubtful. Cowan's connection with Army Intelligence was secret and, because of strict orders, Cowan did not dare to tell him. After all, Captain Meyer, master of the *Benton Harbor*, had an excellent reputation and Esteville might feel justified in rejecting such a wild story without proof.

Thoughtfully Cowan paused under a tree and considered his next step. Summing up,

how much did he actually know? That the *Benton Harbor* was the only ship in the roadstead being loaded with chrome, a vital war material, and that she soon would leave for the United States. Also that Besi John, a notorious criminal and Fifth Columnist, was here on shady business.

A shipping list had been mentioned, too, and enemy agents. One of whom evidently was working in conjunction with Jap submarines, plying along our southern route to Australia. Esteville had said there were no spies and that such a list would be impossible to obtain. Yet Besi John had spoken of both agents and list in a matter-of-course manner. So they *did* exist. How could Cowan find out more about them?

Then he remembered Isola Mayne.

He had never seen her. Pictures, of course. Everyone had seen pictures of Isola Mayne. She was more than a beautiful woman, more than a great actress. She was a legend.

Three years before, she had abruptly retired and going to Singapore, had settled down apparently for life. Then came the Japanese invasion, and Isola, in her own plane, had flown to Palembang, and next to Soerabaja. When she arrived in Sydney she moved the war off the front pages. Then she was gone. She vanished into nothingness.

A few days the world wondered, but with the war, they forgot.

Yet Steve Cowan knew where she was. He knew, because he once had flown supplies to her plantation on New Caledonia. He had not seen her, but knew she was living there in seclusion. And Isola Mayne's brother was Port Captain! The spy must be one of the servants of her household, one who had managed in some way to steal a copy of the sailing list.

Unconsciously, Cowan had wandered back to the jetty. He stopped, staring at the dark blobs—freighters on Paagumene Bay. Much more was at stake out at the Oland Point home of Isola Mayne than appeared on the surface. A sailing list, in the hands of the Jap submarine commanders, might disrupt our whole military line of supplies with the Far East. Which enemy had it—either the Japs or Besi John Mataga—did not matter much with Cowan. Either way it would be disastrous. That list must be recovered!

Mataga was on the island, and somewhere nearby was Koyama. Yet Steve Cowan could not forget Isola Mayne.

She was alone with a few retainers and friends at her plantation at Oland Point.

Mataga's apparent lack of interest in the list had not fooled Cowan. He knew the man too well. Besi John, *besi* being Malay for "iron," would make his own attempt in his own way, but with someone he trusted more than the man "Meyer." And Mataga would strike with utter futility.

Cowan took his cigarette from his mouth and snapped it into the bay. He could do nothing here. Oland Point was the answer.

He dropped into his rubber boat and paddled out to the amphibian.

Opening the door of the cabin, he stepped in. A light flashed suddenly in his eyes and a fist smashed out of the darkness and knocked him to his knees. Someone struck him a vicious blow on the head, then another.

Through a fog of pain as he struggled to hold himself erect, he heard Mataga's harsh voice.

"Lash the beggar!" Besi John cried. "Get going, Chiv. We got a date at Oland Point."

Cowan struggled, trying to shout. Then something crashed upon his skull and he fell forward into a foam of pain that ate into and through him.

It was almost day when he opened his eyes again. The plane was still in the air. Struggling to master his nausea, he tried to reason things out. Still in the air? How could he know they had been in the air all that time? He had been knocked unconscious, and then had come oblivion.

Vague thoughts sifted through the mist in his brain. He struggled to rise, but an arrow of torment from his head made him fall back, helpless. But not before he had discovered that he was tied hand and foot.

Struggling, his brow furrowed, he tried to grope his way back along the trail of semi-consciousness. Something had happened—then? What?

Memory of it was veiled in the mists, in the half-lights of awareness after he had been struck down. How long, he could not recall, yet something had happened. There was a dim recollection of lapping water, a strange dream of firelight dancing upon a dark hull, a mutter of motors, of aircraft motors, and the unceasing murmur of voices.

He remembered, vaguely, through darkness and clouds, a round hump, like that on a camel's back.

It made no sense, but there it was. Were they merely the vague wanderings of when he had been half-stunned, delirious? Or

were they clues to something he should know?

Somehow, that dark hump stood out in his mind, forcing itself always into the foreground of the shadows. He had a feeling of having seen it before.

Finally he opened his eyes, and knew, then, that he had passed out for a second time. The plane was resting on the water. He could hear waves lapping against the hull.

He rolled over, and tipping his head back, found himself looking into the eyes of a half-caste. They were small, cruel eyes, belonging to a man with a twisted mouth and huge, powerful hands. The man watched Cowan, as he might have watched a bug twisting on a pin. Then he smiled, licking his thick lips with the tip of his tongue.

"You like get away?" The voice was low, husky, suggesting confused emotion. The big hands moved, as though by some will of their own, the long, thick fingers clutching, feeling. Cowan found himself watching them with a sort of fascinated horror.

"I'll pay you," Cowan said. "Let me loose and I'll pay you well."

The man's heavy lids lowered a little and his thick lips parted. "I no like money—I like—kill!" The man leaned forward, his piglike eyes glistening. "I like kill! Much blood—I like."

CHAPTER II.

COURAGE OF WOMEN.

IN spite of himself, Cowan's flesh crawled with revulsion. This was no man, but a beast. The blood-thirsty eagerness in the creature was so repulsive Cowan felt sickened, and tried to draw away.

The man chuckled then, deep in his throat.

There was a sudden shot from the nearby beach, and the man looked up. In the dim light his flat, ugly face glistened with sweat. He stared shoreward, and Cowan heard him growling in his throat like an animal aroused from sleep by sounds of battle.

Carefully, Steve Cowan tested the ropes that bound him, straining his muscles against them. But he was bound securely.

The man stirred restlessly, eager to be ashore. Abruptly, Cowan's ears narrowed. Obviously, the man was no more than an imbecile with a lust for torture, for murder.

"They left you behind," Cowan suggested. "They will have all the fun."

The man turned his big head slowly. "Me Yosha. I kill, too!" But he stared toward shore, and his big fingers worked restlessly.

"You could go," Cowan suggested. "I can't get away."

Yosha stared at him, his narrow, blood-shot eyes shiny with thought. His thick lips mumbled a little, and Cowan watched him. Suddenly then, there came a shot from shore, then a scream. Yosha stirred uneasily, then turned his big head to his prisoner.

"I kill you," he muttered, "then you no get away. I kill now."

Cowan's skin turned cold, but his eyes held Yosha's. "No." His voice was positive. Instinctively, he knew that all depended on this moment. Yosha could kill him with one quick lunge, and if once the brute began to move, no power on earth could stop him. "If you do," Steve's voice was even, definite, "Mataga will be angry. But if you killed me while I was getting away, unbound, it would be all right."

He could see the creature mulling it over. Slowly, the suggestion was working its way through the darkness of his brutish mind. Desperately, knowing the result meant life or death, not only for himself but for hundreds of American sailors aboard our ships as well as those ashore, he waited. The creature's eyes swung back, studying the helpless white man with a kind of cruel cunning.

"If you killed me trying to escape, and I was unbound, then Mataga would be glad," Cowan repeated.

If Yosha released him, for a moment only, he would have a chance. A wild, desperate, futile chance, but a chance. Yosha was a brute, his animal strength more formidable than any man Cowan had ever seen. His lust to slay might drive that strength with a feverish energy. Yosha now thought only of getting ashore, of the killing there.

Suddenly, with a surge of eagerness, with a wild intensity that sent a shudder through the Army Intelligence man, Yosha began fumbling with the ropes. Untying Cowan's feet, he reached for the wrists, then stopped. Eyes glistening, his thick lips trembling with murderous frenzy, he reached over and laid the heavy-bladed knife within reach of his hand.

"Besi John, he think you try get away. I kill." Yosha stared at Steve Cowan. "I kill!" he snarled.

Hope went out of Steve Cowan, leaving

him empty. He had hoped for a minute, perhaps two. He had wanted a chance to get his blood circulating after the ropes had been released, a minute to free his muscles of stiffness. Now there would be no such chance. The creature would free him only for the purpose of leaving no severed, blood-stained ropes, and then finish his butchering job.

Suddenly, the ropes loosened, and Yosha grabbed eagerly for the knife. In that instant, a woman screamed. Wildly, desperately, a cry of mortal anguish!

Yosha stiffened, his eyes wide, startled.

Steve Cowan lunged. He hit the half-caste with his shoulder, toppling him over backward. Yosha's big hand grabbed for the handle of the weapon, as his other clutched at Cowan's shirt front.

Cowan jerked back, tearing the thin garment from the grasping hand. Both men lunged to their feet. Steve Cowan, quicker in reaction, swung a wicked blow to the brute's middle. Then he lunged into the half-caste, his fists slamming the big muscled body.

Yosha flinched away, staggering back across the cabin. Yet he held the thick-bladed knife ready, his teeth bared in a grimace of ferocious hate. Then, his splayed feet wide apart, he started creeping across the narrow cabin toward Steve Cowan.

Cornered, desperate, Cowan feinted a blow as the half-caste lunged. Risking everything, the American hurled himself against Yosha's shoulder, and thrown off balance, both men toppled through the open door and struck the water.

Down, down, down! Then, somehow, Cowan discovered he was free and began desperately to swim for shore with powerful strokes.

As Cowan's head broke the surface, he glanced back. The plane rode gracefully on the blue water, not far away. But with the woman's scream still ringing in his ears, Cowan made no move to find out what had become of Yosha. He continued to swim swiftly toward shore. Her fate could be a matter of minutes, perhaps of seconds. And already he might be too late. Even now it might be all over. In a short while Cowan reached the shallows and splashed to land. He crossed the beach at a run. When the jungle had closed around him he felt safe.

A jungle is no enemy to any man who knows it, and Steve Cowan knew the jungle. Moving swiftly and silently, he

worked his way toward the rambling plantation house. He was unarmed, and none knew better than himself the foe he was facing.

Had it been Isola Mayne who screamed? If so, he was too late. The woman who screamed was dead now. He felt sure of that. Probably Isola had discovered the intruders, thinking they were robbers. Perhaps she had refused to tell where her jewels were hidden. Mataga, he knew, would stop at nothing. Although it had not been his intention to burglarize the place, if interrupted, he would certainly add robbery to the program.

Ahead of Cowan was an open French window. He crossed the garden swiftly, moving from one shrubbery clump to the next. Flattened against the wall, he peered in.

Isola Mayne was standing by a table, and the sight of her wrenched a gasp from him. Her dress was torn. Masses of red-gold hair had fallen about her shoulders. Yet despite these things, never before had Cowan seen a woman look so regal, so beautiful, so commanding.

"You tell me!" Besi John Mataga's voice carried a soft but deadly threat. "If you don't, we'll kill the maid. Your Burmese butler was a fool. He gave us no time to explain and we had to kill him." He gesticulated at the body of a man which Cowan noticed, for the first time, lying in the shadows, near the wall. "Where's your brother's wall safe? We know he has one. Tell us, and we'll let you go."

"Oh, so that's your game!" Isola Mayne's voice was low, vibrant, and it made Steve Cowan's nerves tingle. "You're spies and want the shipping list, eh? And my butler was a traitor, too? I suspected it. Contemptible. Well, you'll never find the list because it isn't here."

Mataga's face flushed and his eyes glinted with anger. But he merely turned away.

"Go ahead!" he told his men. "We'll see if she's as brave as she pretends."

Isola Mayne's face paled. "You wouldn't dare," she said, but Steve Cowan detected the resolution draining from her voice, and he saw how her eyes widened with horror. The men with Besi John were savage beasts.

Leaning further, he could see the brutality of the two men holding the maid, a native girl. They had bent her arms cruelly behind her back. The girl's face was white, but her eyes were fearless.

"Don't tell them!" she cried. "No matter what we do, they'll kill us anyway. Why give them what they want? We're no

traitors. If all those soldiers on New Guinea can die for their country; I suppose we women can, too."

"Shut up!" Mataga whirled and struck the girl viciously across the mouth.

Instantly, the room burst into a turmoil of action. Isola Mayne, seizing a paper knife, was around the table with a swift, tigerish movement that took the renegade by surprise. Only a quick leap got him away from the knife. Then he caught the wrist of the lovely young actress in a grasp of iron, and with a brutal wrench, twisted her to her knees.

In the same instant that Isola moved, Steve Cowan had plunged through the open door. He hit the room running, and the nearest of the men holding the maid dropped her arm and wheeled to face him, grabbing for his gun. But he was too slow.

Cowan smashed at him with a round-house swing that started at the door. It knocked the fellow sprawling into a corner, his face pulped and bloody. Springing across the fallen chair, Cowan leaped to close quarters with the other man. A shot blazed in his face, then the American's fist drove deep into the softness of the man's body, and he saw the fellow's face turn sick.

Someone leaped on him from behind. Dropping to one knee he hurled the man over his shoulder, using a judo trick, then lunged to his feet just as Besi John Mataga whipped out a gun. With an expression of unholy triumph on his face, the half-caste leveled his weapon.

For a second Steve looked straight into the gun barrel. Lifting his eyes he could see death in Mataga's cruel face.

Then Isola Mayne, twisting suddenly on the floor, kicked out with all her strength. At the same moment Mataga's pistol roared, sending a blast of fire near the American's face. The bullet went wild. Cowan moved. He hit Mataga in a sudden lunge and the half-caste went down.

Mataga fell, cursing viciously. Catching Isola's wrist, Cowan lifted her from the floor, and seizing an automatic from the table where it had fallen, lunged for the door. The maid, nursing her injured wrist, came stumbling after them.

CHAPTER III.

COUNTERSTROKE.

How they reached the jungle, Steve Cowan never knew. He was aware of hurrying

swiftly, of Isola beside him. When the maid stumbled and fell, he picked her up, almost collapsing after going the last few feet into the jungle.

There had been shooting, he knew. He distinctly remembered the white lash of a bullet scar across a tree trunk ahead of him. He recalled the ugly bark of the guns, too.

"Put me down." The voice brought him back to awareness. It was the maid speaking. He put her down carefully. Her face was white and set, but she seemed uninjured.

Isola was beside her in an instant. "Are you all right, Clara? If anything happens to you here, I'd never forgive myself."

"I'm all right."

Steve Cowan liked the blaze in her eyes. She wasn't afraid, she was only angry. His eyes went to Isola. She was looking at him. She remembered him all right—he could see that—the days when he used to be a commercial pilot.

"I'm Steve Cowan," he said. "I tried to get here in time." Briefly, he explained. "What we'll do now," he added, "is anybody's guess."

Isola was silent, and looking at her, he was struck again by her vivid beauty. But she had more than beauty, she had character, understanding, and purpose. Events that would have driven many women to hysteria had only made her more resolute.

Astonishingly, too, she seemed only a girl. At the thought of her in the hands of a brute like Mataga, he shuddered.

"We'll have to keep moving until we find a place to hole up. Mataga won't quit. Especially," he added grimly, "now that I'm free."

"You knew him before?" Isola said. Her eyes flashed. "He's a spy."

"Sure, I know. Two years ago we had difficulties on Siberut, an island near Sumatra."

"And you won?" Isola suggested. At his nod, she smiled. "I knew you would. You're the type that wins."

They walked on in silence. Despite the maid's injured ankle and knee, he kept them moving fast. There was no time for hesitation. Besi John would move swiftly and shrewdly.

Cowan studied the situation. It could hardly be worse. Esteville would not help him. Nominally the French were in charge, and no American Army officials could inter-

feré without disclosing Cowan's true status. Whatever was done he must do himself.

He checked the magazine of the automatic. Five shots remaining.

"We've got to recapture my plane," said the Army Intelligence man. "Then when I've recovered it, I can fly you to Paagumene Bay." He looked at Isola. "Your Burmese butler was a traitor? He was selling you out to the Japs?"

"I guess so," answered the girl. "He'd been with us for years and we trusted him. Oh, it is so horrible!"

They reached the edge of the jungle near where the plane was moored. A boat was alongside of the amphibian, and two Malays were seated in it with rifles across their knees. Another one of Besi John's men was standing in the cabin doorway.

"Well," Isola said, "it was a good idea."

Grimly Cowan sized up the situation. Three men with rifles. That chance was eliminated. Also there was no hope of doing much at the plantation house. Knowing Cowan as Besi John did, he would prepare for anything, and by now probably had men out combing the jungle. No, Mataga would not blunder, for he was efficient as he was ruthless.

They found a hollow beneath the roots of a giant ficus tree. It was dark, almost, as a cave. Cowan handed the automatic to Isola. "You may need this," he said quietly. "What I have to do, I'll do with my hands."

"You have a plan?"

"No." He could be honest with this woman. There was no need to shield her from reality. "I have no plan. But I'm going to move. We can gain only by action."

She did not warn him, she did not suggest that he guard himself, but something in her eyes carried a tender message. For an instant her hand was on his arm as she smiled.

"Don't worry about us," she said.

Steve Cowan moved swiftly. He knew the jungle too well to be dismayed. Even less than Besi John's imported Malays did he fear the abysmal darkness under the mighty trees. He was familiar with darkness. They superstitiously distrusted it.

Now things were going to happen. Suddenly, he was swept by an overpowering, killing fury. This man Mataga, Mataga and all he stood for, must die. Peter Meyer, Koyama, all of the Jap agents, must be balked. Ships loaded with chrome must not

be diverted to Japan. American cargoes and sailors must be made safe!

In that instant, he changed. Steve Cowan was no longer the hunted, he was the hunter.

There was, he recalled suddenly, a radio at the plantation. Since M. Esteville would not help him, he would help himself.

Night had fallen. Yet moving out through the blackness under the trees, Steve Cowan knew it would be a help rather than otherwise. He left the jungle, and slipped swiftly from tree to tree across the lawn near the mansion.

The radio room was on the second story. He heard the murmur of voices inside. Then saw a guard walk along the porch near the railing. Behind the guard was the lattice he intended to use to get to the second floor. He could have waited, but impatience and hot, goading temper drove him on.

He dropped lightly from a tree limb to the porch. The guard, warned by some sixth sense, turned. Cowan struck like a panther. His left smashed into the man's wind, knocking him gasping against the rail. Then the American smashed him across the eyes with the edge of his hand.

The man fell face down on the porch, and did not move. His gun had fallen over the rail, but he wore a knife. With the blade in his teeth, Steve Cowan went up the lattice. A man sat at the radio, reading a magazine. Being here, he could only be a Mataga man.

Cowan slid a forearm under the man's chin; and crushed it against his windpipe. Then with a quick jerk, he wrenched the fellow back over his chair. Dragging him to the floor, Cowan spoke softly.

"Lie still and live," he said. "Move and you die."

He reached for a rope, and the native acted. He hurled himself at Cowan, his lips twisted in a snarl. Cowan's knife blade, held low and flat side down, slashed suddenly. Blood cascaded down the man's shirt front, and he slumped to the floor.

Cowan sat down at the radio. For an instant he held the key, then he began to send.

BENTON HARBOR . . . SS. BENTON HARBOR . . . HAVE NEW PLAN . . . COME AT ONCE.

KOYAMA.

A door swung open and another man appeared. Evidently he was another guard for he uttered a loud shout when he caught

sight of Cowan. Then without hesitation he whipped out a gun and fired at the American. The sound of the shot rocked the building, as Cowan dodged out of the chair, uninjured. Before the Malay could pull the trigger again, the American threw the knife—low and hard!

It struck. Horrified, the Malay stared at the haft protruding from his stomach. The muzzle of his own weapon sagged as he reached for the knife and tugged it out. Blood gushed, and he fell.

Cowan caught up the gun and sprang into the hall. Two men were charging up the stairs and he sent slugs whizzing at them. Somehow he missed, so he dodged across the hall into another room, slamming the door after him. Then, crouching, he wheeled as bodies smashed against the door. He fired again, once, twice, until the gun clicked empty, and he dropped the useless weapon.

A noise behind him made Cowan turn quickly. A man had come into the window by means of the vines, and Cowan recognized him at once. It was Yosha, the blood-thirsty Malay who had tried to kill him on the amphibian.

Yosha looked bigger than ever. Again Cowan noted the power of his mighty shoulders and massive legs. He was stripped to the waist, now, and with bared teeth, he leaped at the American. Cowan's jab missed and he was seized by powerful arms, swept from his feet and hurled across the room. He hit the wall with a crash but came back fighting, although half-stunned.

The Malay met the American with a straight arm and flung him against the wall once more. When Cowan tried a flying tackle, Yosha met it with a smashing knee that knocked him rolling to the floor. A kick to the forehead sent darts of pain lancing through his brain. The Malay was adept in this kind of fighting.

Drunken with agony, Cowan staggered to his feet. He had realized that this battle must be to the death. So he cut loose a terrific left hook which caught Yosha on the chin and rocked him to the heels. But the Malay only snarled, shook his bullet head and replied with a bludgeoning blow which slashed Cowan across the cheek. Dazed then, the American could not avoid the instant attack which followed.

Coolly, but with diabolical fury, the Malay tried to beat him into submission. Yosha had a knife in his belt and evidently

meant to use it when he had punished the American to his satisfaction. But Cowan kept his head. He weathered the storm and continued to watch for his opportunity.

At last it came. The knife flashed out as Yosha drew and lunged furiously. Now Cowan tried another judo trick. Stepping in, he avoided the thrust, and flipped the blade inward. At the same moment he tripped Yosha. The Malay fell to the floor on top of the knife. Blood gushed, and he rolled over. The haft was sticking out of his chest. Yosha groaned and died.

At this instant shots rang out in the direction of the beach. Cowan sprang for the window. He could see stabs of flame as more shots ripped the air. Still dizzy from the pounding he had received, the American cleared the sill and went down the vines outside, with dangling feet.

Just what was happening he had no idea, but whatever the diversion, he must make it work to his advantage. Running swiftly, he headed for the woods—and for Isola!

CHAPTER IV.

COWAN SETTLES A SCORE.

THE rattle of rifle fire down along the beach was growing. He swung away from that direction, cutting deeper into the jungle. Then he reached the ficus. He swung around before the fallen ficus tree's roots. Isola Mayne and the maid were gone!

Shocked, Steve Cowan stood stockstill, trying to understand. Isola would not have moved willingly, he knew that. The knowledge was no help. He started for the beach, moving fast.

The sound of firing had ceased. He slipped noiselessly through the jungle, and stared out. All was blackness beyond the edge of the trees and he could see nothing. He moved out, creeping slowly. Then he tripped and almost fell. He put his hand down. A dead man.

Feeling around in the dark he found another pistol, which he tucked into his belt, and moved on. His eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, and he saw more bodies. There were corpses of white men among them, white men garbed as sailors.

Whatever the cause of the fight, it had been desperate. Out on the water one of the freighters had started to move. He caught the outline of a Samson post against the sky. Then he knew.

The only ship in Paagumene Bay with Samson posts had been the *Benton Harbor*. That meant Cowan's ruse to make Meyer betray himself had been successful. Peter Meyer had received his message. The message showed he was working with the Jap undercover agents.

Meyer, obviously, had been close outside. That told the American operative he had surmised the doublecross Besi John Mataga had planned. Meyer's arrival had precipitated a battle.

One of Mataga's sentries must have fired on the ship, and Meyer, fearing a trap, had responded.

Steve Cowan stopped. What now? True, Meyer and Mataga were fighting, but that still didn't help him. The shipload of chrome was moving out, probably with a Jap crew, and the Jap master spy, Koyama, was still loose. Also Isola Mayne was gone.

Nothing was settled, nothing was improved. He was free, but apparently helpless. Then he recalled the vague, misty dream of his flight to Oland Point, when he had been a prisoner aboard the plane. How long had they been in the air? He had no way of knowing, but he recalled the camel's hump, and the dark sky.

Neangambol

That dark hump. . . .

He knew then. Jap submarines were gathering in Nehue Bay. Neangambo was an island in the bay, and the dark hump of the hill and trees could be nowhere else near here.

It was almost daylight when Steve Cowan, drunk with fatigue and his head throbbing with pain from the beating he had taken earlier, reached the shore opposite Neangambo.

Out on the dark water was the ship he had seen leaving Oland Point, the *Benton Harbor*. Not far away, moored to a piling, was his own plane!

Steve Cowan wet his parched lips. All right, this was it. He went along the shore to the edge of the village of Nehue. As he had hoped, he found a catamaran. It was the work of minutes to bring it alongside the *Benton Harbor*. He paddled around to the bow, moored the boat to the anchor chain, and went up, hand over hand, at the risk of crushed fingers.

The deck was dark and still. He moved aft, slowly. Voices came from the saloon port. He slipped closer, then glanced in.

Peter Meyer, his face sour with hatred, sat at one end of the table. Nearby, her

hands tied, was Isola Mayne. Behind her, her face white and twisted with fatigue and pain, was the maid. Koyama sat with his back to the port, and across from him was Besi John Mataga, his face dark with hatred and fury.

"So?" The Jap's voice was sibilant. "You thought to betray us. And for that, Besi John Mataga, you die. Those who disobey the Mikado have no place in our plan of things."

Besi John laughed harshly. "Don't saddle me with that. It was Steve Cowan's work." He looked at the stout shipmaster. "I think Cowan knew you are not really Peter Meyer, Steuben. He must have guessed you are not genuine—that you stabbed Meyer and took his place. You may resemble Meyer enough to fool a lot of others, Herman, but you haven't fooled Cowan—much!"

With a cough, the man posing as Peter Meyer scowled. "I killed him under orders. It was for *der Fuehrer*."

The thin Jap leader, Koyama, made a gesture of impatience.

"All this is beside the point," he hissed. "Why did you kill our agent, the butler? Why did you raid Isola Mayne's place? The Burma man was valuable. He gave us sailing lists. Now that valuable person is dead, and my carefully laid plan is ruined. Why did you do that?"

"I tell you I didn't know about it," shouted Besi John, angrily. "I just wanted to rob the place and—get the girl. I didn't know the butler was your man."

The Jap master spy's anger increased. "You are a fool!" he snapped. "For that you must die." He waved his hand toward the women. "They must die, too. No one who knows our plans must remain alive to tell the Yankees."

Another voice, suave and smooth, broke in. "You must not do this, Commander Koyama. Miss Mayne is a famous actress, internationally known. She cannot disappear without causing complications. Better turn her over to my authority. I think I can make her see reason."

Esteville! So that's how it was. The Frenchman was in this with them. All of which explained why the substitution of Steuben for Peter Meyer had been successful. Without hesitation Steve Cowan turned and walked into the cabin.

Mataga saw Cowan first. Trapped and in

danger of losing his life, the renegade had been waiting for a chance to escape from the ship. Like a flash he leaped from his chair, darted through another door and disappeared. A loud splash revealed he had gone over the side of the ship into the bay.

Steve Cowan was too busy to follow the half-caste. As Koyama lunged to his feet and whipped out a gun, Cowan raised the automatic which he had in his hand and fired twice.

As the bullets from the gun of the American agent burned through his stomach, the Jap's face turned sick, and he fell face forward across the table, dead.

It had happened so suddenly that it was like a slow-motion picture, but almost at once the saloon blazed with shots. Steuben grabbed for his gun, and lunged to his feet, firing desperately. Esteville crouched down, out of sight.

In a haze of powdersmoke, Cowan saw Isola and the maid slip out of the door through which Besi John Mataga had disappeared. Steuben was down beside Koyama, now, the smoking pistol clutched in his lifeless fingers. Esteville was hiding behind a table. He had taken no part in the fight and there was no use remaining here any longer. Outside the crew had begun to shout and feet were pattering. So Cowan leaped through the doorway after the two girls, joining them at the railing.

A sailor, in plain sight, opened up with a rifle instantly, and Cowan knocked him spinning with one shot. Then with bullets from other members of the crew pattering around him, he swung over the rail and helped Isola and the maid into the catamaran. Fortunately the outrigger had floated near as the ship drew up on her cable.

Smoke poured from inside the cabin. The stolen shipping lists were there, Cowan believed. Koyama must have gotten them somehow. But they would have to remain for the time being. The fusillade from the crew members was too hot for him to delay. It would have been suicide. With the two women he pushed the catamaran away from the freighter and started to paddle with all his might.

More shots rang out and bullets snipped the water near the slim raft. Luckily the light, just before daylight, was not good, or they would have been slain. He continued to paddle furiously. Soon the freighter was out of sight and the firing stopped.

The plane was ahead, and Steve Cowan swung in close, then crawled aboard. He helped the girls into the cabin and slid into place behind the controls. After several attempts, he got the motors started and warmed them up.

When the ship was in the air, he took stock. His own face was stiff with blood, he knew. His hair was matted with it. His shirt was gone, and there was a bullet burn on his shoulder. Isola Mayne had lost a large part of her clothing, and her face was scratched, and bruised.

Cowan swung the ship around. The freighter below was moving now. They would get out, and get away fast. Soon Cowan noted two other freighters moving. A convoy, ostensibly bound for America, but, in reality, bound for Japan. The traitorous Pierre Esteville had made this possible.

But even well-laid plans can fail. Cowan swung his ship, swooped, and went down in a ringing, whistling dive. Then he opened up with the heavy machine-guns and the cannon. His heavy projectile blasted on the bridge and his lighter gunfire ripped away the pilot-house windows. The cannon shot must have hit the man at the wheel, for the freighter swung suddenly, and turned broadside to the channel.

Banking the Widgeon, Cowan swooped again. From stem to stern he plastered the freighters with gunfire. He grinned suddenly. Take chrome, would they? Get tough with Americans, would they? His teeth bared, he swung for another attack.

Then Isola screamed.

Cowan turned in his seat, startled.

Besi John Mataga was standing in the middle of the amphibian's cabin, his feet spread, his shoulders hunched. His eyes were flaming like an animal's, and as they met Cowan's gaze, he snarled throatily. As Cowan slid out of the seat and faced him, he sprang like a tiger.

There was no choice but to fight, so Cowan met the renegade's rush. One well-placed smash, only, he got in, before Mataga closed with him, battling like the catlike creature he resembled, as the plane dipped dangerously.

Then they were locked in a furious, bitter fight. What happened, Cowan didn't know. The plane was forgotten, there was no time to think, to reason, only to act. Slugging like a madman, he broke away from those

powerful, clutching fingers. He smashed a left to Besi John's face, then a right to the wind, he lunged, butting. Mataga gasped, and sat down, then lunged and tackled Cowan and they both fell.

Through a haze of blood, Steve Cowan saw Isola had taken the controls. Then the half-caste lunged for him, knife in hand. Slapping the wrist aside with his left, Cowan grasped it in his right hand, then thrust his left leg across in front of Mataga and his left arm over and under Mataga's right. He pressed down, and the half-caste screamed as his arm broke at the elbow, and his body lifted and arched, flying over the American's hip.

The right door was open, and the maid had been trying, vainly, to get it closed. Through the opening, just wide enough, Besi John's body hurtled. He grabbed at the sill, desperately, and his fingers held for one breathtaking moment. Then they slipped off.

With a kind of dull horror, Steve Cowan saw the half-caste tumbling down, down, down toward the waters of the bay. When he hit, a fleck of white showed, and he was gone.

Cowan turned, drunken with fatigue and punishment. Isola, her hair free in the wind from the open door, was flying the plane. She looked up at him suddenly, and smiled.

Stupidly, he stared. "You—fly?"

"Didn't you know? I flew the Atlantic once, when I was seventeen. With my uncle. But I flew the ship."

He looked down. A long slim destroyer was sliding past Neangambo Island. Another was off Tonnerre Point in the distance. Evidently the situation was under control.

He collapsed, suddenly, upon the floor.

When he opened his eyes, the ship was resting easily on the water. He looked up. An officer in the blue and gold of the Navy was standing over him.

"All right, old man?" the officer asked, grinning. "You had a rough time of it. We had been checking Esteville, and were suspicious of Meyer. We have him—all of them—in custody.

Steve Cowan looked up. Isola. He had been wondering whose shoulders his head was on.

"Then," he said, still looking at her, "I guess everything is under control."

The Naval officer straightened. He smiled. The Navy knows something of women.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully, "I'd say it was!"

NO MEDALS PLEASE!

By JOE ARCHIBALD

Sergeant Gunner Shoun finds that the hero stuff doesn't mean very much when a pal's life is in danger!

A BIG R.A.F. Bombay flew Sergeant Gunner Gary Shoun and seven other Yank flyers from Brisbane to the airdrome close to the gulf of Carpentaria. There they got their first glimpse of war in the South Pacific. A Consolidated Liberator had landed and smoke curled out from one of its powerful radials. One of its high wingtips had been chewed off and the short, stubby fuselage showed the scars of Jappo gunfire.

Two other big bombers were coming out of the skies—Flying Fortresses. Shoun hoped he would be on the B24s. The Boeings were too big and the stations of the crew too far apart. A guy got lonesome.

The men who had made the long ocean hop began to chatter like a gang of kids in a bus that has arrived at the picnic grounds. They would not get the war over the radio any more. They were where it was going on. "MacArthur might have waited for a couple more days," a pilot said. "Didn't they tell him we were coming?"

"This is it," Shoun said. "No more messing with phony targets."

"I hope you're right, Shoun." A fledgling bomb-aimer grinned. "But I haven't seen a kangaroo yet."

Down on the oil-smear'd gibber plain, ground crews hurried about. Oil and fuel bowsers darted about and the tractor pulling a string of bomb dollies reminded Shoun of the big rattlers in his native state.

The war was at his elbow—he could smell it. Anti-aircraft guns poked their big muzzles above the big sandbag squares and huddling between the big batteries were the prefabricated buildings housing Operations. Over it all, a clatter of sound that intermittently varied its pitch.

"Last stop—end of the line!" Shoun yelled as the old Bombay landed. "Don't forget your parcels." He tumbled out of the troop carrier with eleven other men, all of them absorbing the warlike atmosphere. Two men in flying gear were helping a third along. The ambulance screamed past with stretchers clattering.

Shoun walked with the others toward a

couple of tenders. It was a mile from where the Bombay had landed to the brain center of the Down-Under drome.

"I hear the Marines have landed, Corp," Shoun said to the non-com at the wheel of one as he pulled himself aboard. "How is the war out here?"

"Won't take long for you to find out," the Aussi said. "The bloomin' general was hopin' to meet you personal, but everythin' got busy all at once."

They rolled away from the dispersal area and soon found themselves in a big Naafi hut, subjected to the scrutiny of battle-tested airmen. Aussies and British pilots, Yanks and a pair of Hollanders.

"How are the Zero fighters?" a pilot asked.

"Tough, Lieutenant. This ain't the South Seas you saw in the movies, pal. You get knocked down over one of those islands and you won't find no sarongs. It'll be a dame with black teeth, chewin' betel nuts and carryin' her departed husband's skull on a necklace."

Shoun sipped some gin and lime and grinned. Movies. The crack reminded him of Jerry Tynan. He had known Tynan in Hollywood. He was here somewhere. He asked about the man.

"He's in the briefing room," a big Yank pilot said, "Looking at pictures of Timor and Port Moresby. The Tannoy will start yelling in a minute. You're a slave to it, Shoun. We call it 'Wailing Winnie.' You know Tynan?"

"Some," Shoun said.

He grinned and got himself another drink. Back in the land of make believe far, far away in Hollywood, Tynan had been going places when the war spoiled everything. He had done a neat bit in "Wings over the Channel." He had everything Gable had, but he had to have more time. Shoun wondered if the pilots knew.

Tannoy, of British vintage, bawled orders to the bomber crews to be hopping toward the big kites. Shoun followed the war-birds out of the big hut and looked at the men going out to take a crack at the Nips.

Tynan swung past, phone jacks and oxygen tube dangling, looking much bigger than he was in the coveralls.

"Luck," Shoun called to him. "Action—camera! Come back a hero, Ty."

Tynan yelled something but the roar of starting Wright Cyclones washed his words away.

"Your friend, Tynan, he'll make it all right," a pilot with a healing scar said to Shoun. "Hasn't been here long. Don't tell yourself you'll be a hero in six weeks either."

"Hero!" Shoun spat. "The last thing I want to be. A medal never was a meal ticket in a beanery. Ten years ago I saved two kids from drowning and got a Carnegie medal. The mayor gave me the key to the city and a civic club blew me to lunch. After that I went away and I came back broke. They forgot about it all. Hero? Hah!"

Dusk deepened and shadows stretched from huts and gun placements and grounded planes. In Operations, men studied a big map. The men at mess thought of the crews of the B17s out over the sea.

Shoun wondered about Tynan. Was the guy trying to be a hero? No one had mentioned Tynan's before-the-war occupation and it looked as if the Hollywood prospect had kept it secret. The guy must have a reason.

It seemed hours before the Fortresses came back. The Watch Office directed them in and the big kites came in on the Lorenz beam and along the flare path. Only three were back. Another big bomber belly-landed and came close to washing up a fuel bowser and a dozen of the ground crew.

Tynan walked into the big hut after a session with Intelligence. His face was a little white and the glare of the searchlights over New Guinea was still in his eyes. Battle-weary fliers followed, some grinning, some showing no emotion.

"Pretty show," a short, stocky gunner said. "Number Six was pouring out smoke when we saw her last. The guys must be gettin' a bath about now."

Shoun felt a little cold lump in his stomach and wondered about his own courage. Jerry Tynan stared at him, pulling slowly on a cigarette.

Sergeant Shoun did not hear about the two who were killed in the Fortress until the next morning. He had to talk, then, to keep his nerves steady.

"Not like a movie, Tynan," Shoun said. "In a movie, you know you'll be a hero and you'll recover in a hospital with a pretty nurse holding your hand. How does it feel to be playing for keeps?"

"Say!" a pilot stared at Jerry Tynan. "Now I get it. I wondered who you looked like. In Darwin I saw that movie you were in, Tynan. Yeah, a live flake got set off and kicked into a slosh of gas in a Lockheed. The hero—well, blast my soul!"

"You got a big mouth, Shoun," Tynan snapped.

"An actor," a navigator said. "A movie actor. Tell me how I can meet Rita Hayworth, Jerry."

"Tell Lana Turner to send me an autographed sweater, kid. Imagine, he was holding out on us!"

"'Wings over the Channel' with a set of dishes," a Yank from Maine howled.

Shoun could have cut off his tongue. He saw it now. Jerry Tynan knew what would be expected of a man who had acted the hero on a silver screen. He would have to show what kind of nerve he had when the real thing came up. There were two strikes on a man like Tynan before he climbed into a Fortress. The world expected him to become a hero.

Tynan got up and walked out of the big hut. Sergeant Shoun followed him.

"I'm sorry, feller," Shoun said when he found Tynan. "I guess I didn't know I was loaded. Three of them gin and lime—"

"Yeah?" Tynan said. "But the cat's out of the bag, Shoun. Not being a star, I figured they wouldn't remember me. Now I've got to be a hero."

"Nuts!" Shoun said. "You just do your job and let other guys get the medals. Ever try to eat one? Heroes! Remember Lindbergh? Remember Fonke? That Frenchman was a hero for years until he played with the Nazis."

"You built me up," Tynan snapped. "I got to produce. You picked the wrong job in Hollywood, Shoun. You should have been a press agent. . . . Let's talk about the war."

"Yeah," Shoun said. "It looks like they've been catching plenty on this station."

"We're short of men and planes so we double in brass," Tynan said. "You'll get a good look at the Zeros tomorrow, Shoun. You won't be able to shoot off your mouth when you get a taste of what they throw. Imagine you, a gunner."

"Funny world, Tynan."

Shoun got the word the next morning. His niche was going to be a blister on a Fortress. The man that had been working a side gun had stopped one for keeps.

Shoun was tagged for the B17 with Tynan. The commander got the new men in the Operations room and gave them an idea of *esprit de corps*. The men in a B17 were one compact little family and the actions of one could have a good or bad effect on the actions of the others. You worked as a team and you were not on your own.

Four hours later, Shoun was in the briefing room with a lot of other men and studying an enlarged map that a projector threw on a screen. Outside the big Fortresses were being readied. The bowsers were gassing and oiling them and bombs were being fitted in the lugs.

The squadron commander and the Intelligence officer told of the job that had to be done. Attacks on Jap warships and transports off Timor and in the Banda Sea west of New Guinea.

Shoun climbed up the little ladder into the big bomber and went to the starboard gun station. The navigator took his place in the greenhouse in the nose. The wireless operator settled down at his little table and Tynan bumped into Shoun as he went to take his place at the astro hatch. That is not a nice job. A man has to keep his head in that glass dome and give a running commentary on what takes place around him. A fair squirt in the astro hatch and a head goes off.

Then Shoun got the feel of the fifty-caliber gun and heard the pilot and co-pilot checking. The commander was checking with the watch officer. Then the Cyclones howled and a violent tremor ran the length of the great bomber.

"Check list!" the pilot said.

Shoun made sure he had hooked his life preserver in place, rubbed the palms of his moist hands against his hips and looked out through the plexiglass. He saw a Fortress already air borne and he wondered how a Jap Zero pilot could miss such a target.

Pilot and co-pilot having checked, the giant plane moved along the ground a thousand yards before it got buoyancy under its mighty wings.

"This is it," Shoun said, and sat in his little seat.

The B17s would go up high, then come down in a gliding attack against the Jap

naval convoy. They would have to go through a screen of Jap Zero Fighters.

Radio messages came from the station when the Fortresses slipped off the continent. At seven thousand, the bombs were made "live." The navigator was showing them the way and he had a voice that steadied a man's nerves.

Shoun slid his thumbs up at the release buttons in the block and let a burst or two go.

"That was a butterfly," the pilot quipped in the intercom. "Don't go gun-crazy, Shoun."

The Fortresses kept climbing and the crews had to take to the oxygen. They went up to twenty thousand. The blood pounded in Shoun's temples but not for lack of oxygen. They had been out a long time.

Tynan began to talk in the astro hatch. Down on the sea there were little white penciled lines and above them little bursts of gunfire. It was time to go down through a sky, devoid of clouds, but streaked with the vapor trails of Jappo planes. Shoun saw them when the big bomber peeled off, and he got set.

He had wondered how he would feel when the time came. Not bad at all. Just a little looseness in his knees.

"Jap Fighters behind!" Tynan yelled.

"Good luck, guys," the pilot said.

Then the bomb-aimer was directing the pilot down against those sleek splinters of steel that were Jap battlewagons heading toward Tulagi.

"Off-left—steady! Cut the run, Halliday."

The Zero Fighter was turning sharply toward the Fortress and Shoun cursed the yellow devil at the controls and fed him a quick burst. The tracers howled just under the Zero which raked the B17 with its guns.

Bullets sang off the breech block of Shoun's fifty caliber and shattered the plexiglass. Shoun felt the sweat pour out of him as he looked at the spidery design the gunfire had made. For several seconds he was frozen. Behind him a gunner was steadily firing.

"Shoun, on your gun!" Tynan roared. "Two Zeros on you!"

Shoun jerked up as if struck and swung his gun to bear on a Zero that whanged in at the gliding Fortress. Voices in the intercom were drowned out when the gun pounded. Nine hundred a minute you could pump out of the baby. He thought he must have put seven hundred into the Zero before it turned over on its back and gushed smoke.

Another took its place. Say! These Nips incubated Zeros in mid-air.

The Fortress was down pretty low. Shoun could see the little mites tearing around the decks of the Mikado's ships, could see the fire coming out of their guns.

Yank surface craft were after those battle-wagons, too. Great geysers of white water pocked the sea around the zigzagging convoy ships. A plane crashed into the sea, sent up a plume of steam, and pieces of the Zero still swirled in the sky.

Behind Shoun, a gun was silent and the pilot tried to get the gunner. His voice kept roaring. The wireless operator took over the blister.

Shoun looked down quickly and saw a still white face looking up at him. The eyes were open but there was no expression in them.

The B17 seemed to have been singled out by the Zeros. A big dragonfly beset by wasps and maddened by their stings.

"Yeah, this is it," Gunner Shoun bit out as he swung that starboard gun.

Subconsciously he heard a voice boom above the whip-lash of bullets and thunder of engines:

"Bomb doors open!"

A burst of shrapnel smashed close to the B17's tail and it pitched and bucked. Shoun roared crazily when he saw a Zero burst in front of his eyes. Pieces of it banged against the fuselage and the flame of the explosion blinded Shoun for several precious seconds.

Something got him on the side of the head before he could shake the crimson mist loose. When he had his senses back, he was on the floor.

The B17 lurched crazily again but it was only the uplift after the bombs had been released. Down below there was a series of explosions that cleared the gunner's fogged brain. The voice in the intercom cleared.

"Starboard gun—come through, Shoun. Come through!"

The navigator was helping him up.

"Okay," Shoun said, and stood at his gun again.

"Not so okay!" somebody roared. "A port engine is out. There's a pool of gas on the runway."

"Zeros trying to come up under us," Tynan called out from the astro hatch.

Halliday would take care of them, Shoun knew, as he tried to pick off a Jappo Fighter that screamed down over the Fortress. The rattle of its lead against the

top of the fuselage sounded like blows from a rivet hammer. Nippo ammo came through the circular ribs of the B17 and Shoun heard the gunner behind him grunt.

"Amidships!" the bomb-aimer yelled. "A cruiser, sir! We got our share, sir."

Down on the sea, three ships were sinking. The Jap cruiser was listing heavily to port and the crews of the bombers could see the Japs sliding off the deck and into the sea when the wind drove a lot of the black smoke away. The waters of the Banda Sea were spotted with the heads of little yellow men. The wreckage of Zero Fighters mixed in with the heads. And mixed in with it all was the outline of a B17 just beginning to go into the depths.

Shoun, his mouth terribly dry, all of his muscles aching, kept potting at Zero Fighters. The pilot was lifting the battered Fortress up to join the others that were left. In formation with all their guns going they were hard to cope with.

Shoun wondered how many of the seven-man crew were left. Over the intercom, the pilot was checking them in. Walsh and Trefethen did not answer.

"Making it all right now," Shoun heard the bomb-aimer say as he watched his tracers knife through the office of a Zero.

The Jap plane went into a spin and did not come out of it when it reached the smoky strata below. The bomb-aimer's voice was forced, Shoun thought, as he called out to Tynan. The man in the astro hatch answered.

"No bloody hero, now!" Shoun cautioned.

Tynan said something Shoun couldn't get. He saw the Fortress fall into position off their right wing and all its guns were going. Teaming up now for the run home. Shoun felt secure now the B17s were bunched. They made an aerial fort that was hard to storm. The gunners were all with him, keeping a screen of protecting bullets around the Fortresses.

Zeros, piloted by Tojo's little fanatics, tried to blast through the arcs of fire and when the Yank gunners were finished with them, they had a string of Zeros—five more Jap planes written off.

"Got enough for today—all their stomach will hold," Shoun heard the commander say. "Nice work, men—nice work. How is it, Halliday?"

"One engine knocked out, sir. We'll make it all right."

The pilot checked his crew. Shoun put

himself through, leaned against the bulkhead, plenty used up.

The B17 was pointing her stubby nose toward the high strata when shrapnel came up from below. Shoun could see belches of fire from Jap ground guns. The heavy stuff broke up around the Fortresses and they split apart until they could get away from the fortified island.

"Every trip like this one?" Shoun muttered.

Somebody laughed and told him his first trip had been a tame one.

Yeah? The guys back home hadn't told how tough it really was. Guys like Heatter and Swing, they hadn't given out the half of it on the radio.

The B17 was having trouble gaining altitude and the Nippo shells broke around it. Shoun lost his footing when one of them hit. The big bomber bucketed and nearly went over on its back. The panel lights went out and confusion took over the B17 for the next few seconds.

Gradually things sorted themselves and Shoun pulled himself erect. Not a sound came through the intercom. The bite of amatol was in Shoun's nostrils, the inside of the bomber smelled of Tojo at his worst.

The co-pilot up ahead was holding onto an injured arm. Tynan's face swam in the semi-darkness.

Halliday, the pilot, checked the crew again. No more casualties. The Cyclones were making a racket Shoun did not like and there was a smell coming into the bomber that made his blood run cold.

"A hole in the fuselage almost big enough to crawl through," the skipper said. "Nearest starboard engine on fire. Stand by, men. Snap those picks on and be ready to abandon—"

"A lot of water down there," the navigator said.

"And sharks!" Tynan called out. "Keep flying speed, sir. Leave it to me."

"Him!" Shoun choked, and hurried forward past the bomb compartment, keeping his head down. "He's got to be a hero! Tynan, you fool!"

"We're short of planes," somebody was saying. "We've got to bring this Fortress in."

Shoun thrust a gunner aside and looked at the hole in the side of the B17.

The pilot ordered the crew to get the extinguishers and shoot the stuff through the hole. The chemical was dissipated by the air-screw blast and then Tynan smashed

the metal casing against the jagged edges of the metal in the gap left by the bursting shell.

"I can make it through there, Skipper," he called, and thrust his head forward. "Somebody get an engine cover—"

Sergeant Shoun got Tynan by the legs and yanked him out. Smoke and fire boiled into the bomber.

"That's for me, Pal!" Shoun yelled, and bumped the swearing co-pilot out of the way. "You and your hero stuff, Tynan!" the others heard him say before he got his head and shoulders through the jagged hole.

He managed to get out on the shattered wing and inch himself forward, getting grips on exposed wing sections. The fire bit through his clothes and the slip-stream battered him and nearly tore him off the B17. He hung on, coughing smoke out of his lungs.

The fire clawed at his face and he nearly caved in before he had the flames smothered. He felt somebody pulling at his ankles and faint voices swirled in the roaring crater he was plummeting into.

The chain comprised of three human links got Sergeant Shoun back into the B17.

"Trying to be a hero!" he was babbling. "The squirt! I got you into it, kid. I'll get you out!"

They put Shoun on the floor and looked him over and the commander cursed steadily. Hot metal can do more to a man than it can to wood or fabric. Airplane designers had spent hundred upon hundreds of hours figuring out a metal that would stand the heat of the exhausts of 1200 horsepower engines.

Shoun's face was not pretty. His hands were terribly burned and cut by the jagged edges of burning metal. The wireless operator kept beating the smolder out of Shoun's clothes and the co-pilot kept applying tanic acid jelly to the gunner's face.

"Don't try to be a hero, he told me," Tynan kept saying a little hysterically. "But me, I'm only a movie hero. You guys figure it out—last man through that hole was a rotten egg. Sergeant Shoun, hero!"

Tynan's face became ashen and he touched it with a trembling hand.

Shoun came back a little and mumbled for Tynan's benefit:

"You got chances—to get killed—without lookin' for them, kid. Me, with my big mouth. . . . Another one comin' in at us, Skipper. The yellow devils—spawn in the air, don't they? There he goes to talk with

the Jap heaven gatekeeper! Sukiyaki—hero—nuts!”

The pilot headed the crippled Fortress toward the station and began picking up communication with the brain center. Shoun was lifting himself up on one elbow when the bomber began to circle over the air-drome. The commander eased him back and Shoun looked up at him with eyes that had no lashes or brows.

“No blasted hero, you get that, don’t you?” Shoun managed through blistered lips. “It don’t pay off. . . . You watch that Tynan. He—he’s got an idea he has to be more than a movie—”

“Hero?” the commander shouted. “You’ll be lucky you don’t get kicked out, Sergeant. Say, how do you feel? Take it easy, Shoun, and don’t talk.”

“Brace yourselves,” Halliday said. “We’re goin’ in a little heavy. . . .”

Shoun spent a month in a hospital and returned to 186 Squadron to show the guys what a nice job the medicos had done on him. The fire had not bitten as deep as had been supposed. But Shoun would never be a collar ad. One side of his face was shiny and red. One corner of his mouth was permanently twisted. There was a patch of skin on his neck that had come off his upper arm.

Standing in the mess, while the pilots and gunners and bombardiers drank to him, Shoun sensed a touch of reserve on the part of Halliday and Tynan.

“I got something to say,” Shoun said, and sat down. “I want you to be sure about somethin’, pals. Tynan there thought he had to be a hero after you found out he had done a bit of acting in an air epic. I had to watch to see he behaved himself for how do you think he’d make a livin’ if he had a

face like mine? Yeah, a bullet where it wouldn’t show or a busted leg wouldn’t hold him back from Hollywood when this war ends, but a face—”

Shoun took time out for a drink. He put a match to a cigarette and drew the smoke into his lungs.

“Go on,” Halliday said.

“His face is his fortune if he gets through this war,” Shoun said. “Me, I live by my brains and it’s hard to burn out a man’s brain. The first guy here that calls me a hero will get busted in the nose.”

“You haven’t told us everything, Shoun,” Tynan said, grinning. “Maybe these guys don’t know what you did in Hollywood. Something tells me, Shoun, that an agent is always an agent. Spill it, Shoun.”

“Yeah,” Shoun said, glad he had been given an out.

He was no sentimentalist. Maybe he should have let the guy ruin himself if he had been crazy enough to look for a chance to be a hero. But—

“Even in a war, Tynan,” he said, “you got to think what you’ll do when it’s over. I know a guy who will be a big shot in Hollywood some day. I want ten percent of him. I had to see the Japs didn’t get ninety percent or all of him. You, Tynan!”

“A punk ten percenter!” Jerry Tynan grinned, went over and poked Shoun lightly in the stomach. “Sure, it’s a deal, Shoun. If we get our ten percent of the Japs without spoiling the looks we have to have in Hollywood.”

Halliday ordered drinks and shook his head.

“I’ve seen and heard everything now. Say, Tynan, could you get Rita Hayworth to write to me?”

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 25.

1. Kittyhawk, Mohawk, Tomahawk, and Warhawk.
2. The original Wright plane had a 12 horsepower motor. Wright Cyclone engines used in 1944 model planes are usually 2,000 horsepower each.
3. Any ten of the following: Essex, Intrepid, Bunker Hill, Hornet, Wasp, Lexington, Yorktown, Belleau Wood, Cowpens, Cabot, Langley, Bataan.
4. None. The Waco CG4A is a glider used for carrying 15 fully equipped infantrymen.
5. United States, France, Germany, Spain, Italy among others.
6. At least one U.S. Army Wright biplane of this period had a Lewis machine-gun which was mounted in front of the gunner and almost held in his lap.
7. British and German flyers used them first in 1917.
8. The Loft is the recreation room used by Ferry Command pilots while off duty or awaiting assignment.
9. The War Training Service of the Civil Aeronautics Administration which is training more than 200,000 men every twelve months for Army, Navy and other wartime requirements.
10. Two, three, four and six.

THIRTEEN IS FOR TROUBLE

By LAURENCE VICTOR

Smash the Japs and smash the jin~~x~~—Dirk Conklin takes both jobs in his stride when disaster threatens!

YANK grenade-tossers had scarcely blown the last Jap machine-gunner into the arms of his ancestors, when the P-40s moved into Buna airfield.

Captain Dirk Conklin set his ship down on the shell-pocked tarmac and waved the rest of his flight in. Ground crews, carried by jeep over the Owen Stanley mountains from Port Moresby, were already cleaning up the pitted field and the blasted hangars for American use. The sound of battle was dying, except for a few wild yells and scattered shots as Yanks and Aussies hunted out Jap stragglers along the shoreline.

Captain Conklin slid his greenhouse back and slipped to the ground. He counted noses as the other planes of his flight roared in and braked to a halt, one by one.

The last P-40 of the squadron appeared over the tree tops, wobbling badly.

"Sweeney's in trouble!" Barney Mitchell said tensely.

"Prepare for crash landing!"

The plane swooped in crazily, with a dead motor, dived on the field, pulled up into a near stall, dipped down again and the wheels struck, too hard. The ship bounced, one wheel struck a shell hole. It heeled over, tore off a wing and somersaulted onto its back.

The men raced up and dragged Lieutenant Warren Sweeney from the cockpit, muddy, but unbowed. He stood on shaky legs and surveyed the complete wreckage of his plane.

"Reckon I'll be grounded for this, Captain?" he asked innocently.

"You grounded yourself, you dope!" Conklin replied. He looked at the gashes from Zero guns in the wrecked fuselage. "We'll call Port Moresby and see what they can do about replacements. Any chance of salvaging this, Miller?" he asked a mechanic who had come up.

"Afraid not, sir," the man said. "Motor's shot to pieces and the fuselage—"

"All right, Sweeney, you're grounded—till we get you a new plane."

By afternoon of the second day, the battle had roared west toward Sanananda Point, where a remnant of the Jap forces was clinging stubbornly to the shoreline. The P-40s ranged out on offensive sweeps, strafing and bombing the Jap lines from Sanananda to Lae. But Buna airfield had reverted almost to its original jungle quiet.

Dirk Conklin, coming in from a flight, found Lieutenant Sweeney in conversation with a bushy-haired native who bore the trappings of a chief. Sweeney waved to the captain.

"Hey, Dirk! Come over here a minute, will you? This guy talks English!"

The native eyed him gravely as he approached.

"Tell the captain what you were telling me," Sweeney urged.

"Americans must take warbirds off Buna field," the native said in good English.

"Take them off? Why?"

"Listen to him, Dirk, he's good," Sweeney insisted.

"Curse on Buna field," the native said solemnly. "When yellow men come, they kill witch doctor. They push sword on end of gun into him slowly. He put curse on Buna field—say men who fly warbirds will die. Now he is dead. There is no one to remove curse. Yellow men all dead, now Americans will die."

Dirk Conklin was conscious of movement behind him. The men of the squadron were craning over his shoulder to see and hear.

"Well," he said, relieved. "If that's all that's got you excited, Sweeney, you can quit worrying. I'll take a curse any day to a lot of Zero wing cannon!"

"No!" the chief protested. "Curse real. All Japs dead, now Americans will die unless curse is removed."

Conklin made a gesture of impatience.

"Give him some tobacco, or food, or anything he wants," he said turning away. "I'm not going to fool with that stuff now."

The radio operator met him as he strode across the field.

"Replacement plane coming in from Port Moresby, sir. Within sight of field, he says—there he is!"

The muted thunder of a Merlin boomed over the jungle and the Curtiss Warhawk slid over the treetops and came in for a landing.

Sweeney came dashing up as Conklin and the mechanic, Corporal Miller, were checking over the plane.

"Is that mine?" he said excitedly. "Baby, come to papa! I've been growing calluses on my feet from walking and I'm not used—hey!"

"What's biting you?" Conklin grunted.

"Look at that!"

The squadron leader followed his pointing finger to the plane's rudder. Neatly stencilled on the camouflaged surface was the ship's identification number 13013.

"Double thirteen!" Miller groaned. "Holy cow, what a swell dish of grief! Double for trouble!"

"Cut that out!" Conklin snapped. "What's going on around here? First native curses, now the 'thirteen' jitters! Lieutenant Sweeney, if you're scared of that ship you can have mine and I'll take this one!"

"No, you don't!" Sweeney said hastily. "Nobody is going to gyp me out of this baby. Who's afraid of the big bad thirteen?"

In truth any superstitions seemed far-fetched. The plane behaved superbly on their first flight up. Conklin rode in the van, with Sweeney on his left and Barney Mitchell on his right, the rest of the boys in formation behind them.

They came in over Lae at ten thousand and flushed a covey of Zeros out of a cloud-bank. The Nips came in at a sharp angle, wing guns jabbering.

"Make your pass and keep going!" Conklin warned. "Anybody who gets out of line gets a punch in the snoot, if he's got a snoot left to punch!"

The fast Zeros swept in and broke up like rain around them. Conklin heard a sudden patter, as though someone had flung a handful of pebbles at his ship. A Zero screamed in front of him and his pressure on the firing button was automatic. The Jap heeled over violently and started down.

Smoke began to struggle out of the motor cowling.

Conklin had shot through and was in the clear. He took a quick look around. The boys were following him, close up. Sweeney was still on his left. But, as the captain glanced that way, he saw the red tide that covered the lieutenant's face and neck, saw his lips contorted in agony.

"Sweeney!" he shouted. "Are you hit bad? Can you get back?"

Sweeney's bloody head moved. His lips formed the words with difficulty.

"I'll try, Dirk."

He made a fair if wobbly bank and they streaked for home. Dirk Conklin slammed in, hopped out and watched anxiously as Sweeney's plane came in for a landing. The controls seemed sluggish, the plane panicked in and made a squashy landing, but it remained topside up.

They rushed it and yanked back the bird-cage. Sweeney was dead.

They refused to meet each other's eyes. Then someone mumbled:

"The only one hit in the fight. Thirteen is for trouble—"

"Shut up!" Conklin snapped. "We're not going to have any of that around here. Come on, let's get him out. Miller! Where's that mechanic?"

"Here, Captain!" The ground man came running up.

"Check this plane and see that it is in flying shape right away. 'It's going to be used again, on the next flight!'"

Barney Mitchell stopped Conklin on his way to his office.

"Dirk, can I ask a favor?"

"Sure, Barney, what's on your mind?"

"Lemme try that 13013, will you?"

"Why?"

"Well, the boys are working up a little scare on it and I'd like to crack the jinx for them and show them how silly it is. Okay?"

"Well, I was kind of figuring on taking it myself—"

"Aw, lemme do it, Dirk!"

"Okay—it doesn't matter who does it as long as it's done. She's yours."

The squadron took the air before dawn with Barney Mitchell on Conklin's left, in Sweeney's old spot. Barney threw the squadron leader a confident grin through the plexiglas and shook his clasped hands overhead in the fighter's gesture of victory. Conklin felt his heart lift. Trust Barney to kick a jinx in the pants.

He was right, too. Let a thing like this go on and the whole bunch might get the jitters. Nip it quick, that was the answer.

They ran into the Zeros over Sanananda, almost as if the Nips had been waiting for them. In tight formation, they swept through the cloud of Jap fighters like an eagle brushing through a swarm of mosquitoes. And like mosquitoes, the Zero guns buzzed their vicious song. But the concentrated fire of paired guns mowed them down.

It was almost frightening to see the Jap planes fly apart, see the little pilots come hurtling out.

They broke through and kept going, but the more maneuverable Zeros hummed about them, blazing away with their 20 mm. wing cannons.

Out of the corner of his eye, Conklin saw unexpected movement. He jerked his head about. Barney Mitchell was winging off to the left in a straight line.

Conklin craned his neck. There was nothing out there but jungle. And in any case, Mitchell had been forbidden to break formation. He snapped on his radio.

"Barney! Where the blazes are you going?"

There was no answer. Mitchell kept going. And from above, a Zero dived on the double 13 Warhawk.

It was a combination of fear and the protective instinct that made Dirk Conklin break his own rule about staying in line. Fear that the jinx would strike again; the protective instinct that made him think of his men as though they were his children.

Like a flash, he whipped his own P-40 around and sent it screaming across space to intercept the diving Zero.

The Jap didn't expect him. He saw the looming P-40 too late, tried to pull out and decided against it, knowing his frail craft could not stand the strain. He had to keep going.

As he passed into Conklin's sights, the captain threw the whole works at him. The Zero broke up and Conklin's plane swept through into the clear.

When he had banked around he saw the formation, half a dozen miles away, swinging back, still in line, for another pass at the swarming Zeros. But the sky was empty of Barney Mitchell.

It was a heavy-hearted and solemn squadron that came to rest on Buna airfield and confronted their squadron leader. Dirk Conklin faced them and for a moment

found no words. Before he could speak, they heard a plane.

Barney Mitchell's P-40 came in over the trees, wabbling a little, flying stickily, but flying. It made a splashy landing and grunted to a halt. But Mitchell, when they pushed back his cover, was dead.

Conklin had lots of time to think that night. The boys were shaken, worried. He himself had no patience with the idea of a jinx, or a curse. The fact that both pilots were dead when their planes landed made this seem much more sinister than even a curse. Some dirty business was afoot, some definite sabotage. But what?

He had taken the only step which seemed open to him. He had announced that he would fly 13013 himself the next day. And now, while the camp slept, he was curled up on a pile of canvas in the hangar near the jinx plane, with a flashlight in one hand and a .45 automatic in the other. If this was sabotage, Dirk Conklin proposed to make the most of it.

His mind was busy on the possibilities as he lay and waited for something to happen. There was no one he mistrusted. The native chief, with his talk of a curse? Could that have been camouflage for a more realistic attack on the planes? But what would a native know about sabotaging a modern airplane? Anyway, he wasn't sure that sabotage had been committed. His one clue was that Mitchell's controls had seemed to lock. If that could be called a clue.

Dirk Conklin never knew when he fell asleep. He woke to the soft, secret sounds of movement near the plane. He jerked upright and the flashlight fell from his fingers with a clatter. Light steps pattered away and vanished.

Cursing furiously, Conklin groped for and found the light. He sent a beam stabbing toward the doorway, but it was empty. A moment later he was outside, sending the beam swinging about the field. No one was in sight.

Dejectedly he returned to the plane, berating his own stupidity. To fall asleep on the job! That was the kind of thing men were shot for in wartime. He didn't allow himself the luxury of remembering that he had been on duty all day and had the worry and strain of his squadron to add to his fatigue.

Now he crawled painstakingly over the ship, examining it by the aid of his flashlight. He could find nothing wrong. At last

he gave up and went to bed. In spite of his agitation, he was asleep as soon as he hit the cot.

The rumble of warming motors brought him up in the morning. When he got out on the field he found Corporal Miller checking the jinx ship's motor carefully.

The mechanic turned an anxious face to the captain.

"Just wanted to be doubly sure, sir," he said.

"Did you find anything that looks peculiar to you, Miller? Anything at all? Somebody was tampering with the ship last night. I nearly caught him."

"No, sir, there doesn't seem to be a thing wrong. Listen to that Merlin purr."

The big question in Conklin's mind was:

Did he scare off the intruder before or after his attempt to sabotage the plane? It before, okay. If after— Yet the mechanic found nothing wrong. He couldn't back down now in front of all his men. They'd think he was scared of the jinx.

Without a word he climbed into the seat and slid shut his greenhouse. They took off in new formation.

The Japs had an appointment with them over Gona. They flashed out of the sun and onto the P-40s with every gun blazing. Yank machine-guns hammered back. Conklin saw a Yank plane, hit, stagger out of line and start losing altitude. His own guns were blazing.

Suddenly his controls locked.

"Oh-oh," he said aloud. "This is it."

He braced himself for the inevitable spin to earth. But, instead, some invisible force seemed to take over the ship. It roared off at a tangent, away from the formation. Looking back, Conklin saw a Zero dart out of the mixed dogfight and start after him.

Inspiration struck him. Hurriedly he shrugged out of his flying jacket and life preserver, stripped off his helmet. He slid down in his seat until he was practically on the floor and from this position arranged the jacket around the life preserver. He released the valve which inflated the "Mae West" and let it fill the jacket. With the helmet perched on top of this contraption, it looked sufficiently like a pilot to fool someone going by at high speed.

A sudden storm of bullets pounded the plexiglas above him to pieces and danced on the metal of the ship. The Zero screamed past and he caught a flashing glimpse of the pilot's face, grinning in enjoyment. He huddled under the seat.

The Zero banked, came around and swept down for the kill. Again bullets poured into the cockpit. One found the life preserver. There was a *pop!* of released air and the dummy slumped down against the dashboard. The Zero hurtled past and was gone.

Conklin was so cramped that he could hardly breathe. But he waited while the P-40 droned on. Presently she went into a long, careful bank. He reached up and tested the controls. They were firmly locked.

Buna came into sight. Peering out as the plane dipped in for a landing, Conklin saw that his men had arrived, were standing and staring up at him with the same baffled expressions they had worn twice before.

His plane landed itself, squashily, but safe. As the men poured across the field, Conklin disentangled himself from his tiny quarters, ripped open the hatch and came out.

He saw the men's jaws drop open, but he wasn't looking at them. He was looking over and beyond them, to where Corporal Ralph Miller was just emerging from the repair hangar. And Conklin's automatic was in his hand.

Miller's jaw dropped like the others when he saw the captain emerge. But his face held another expression—one of sharp fear. His hand darted down, came up with a gun.

Conklin's weapon began to bark. Miller squeezed off one hurried shot, then folded in on himself and collapsed across the hangar threshold.

"There's your jinx," Conklin said, leaping down. "I was a dope not to spot it before it cost two lives. Nobody but Miller could have done it. A radio-controlled robot pilot in the plane—the control mechanism in his repair shop. All he had to do was lock the controls and we were ducks for the Zero. When they radioed him the pilot was knocked out, he brought the ship back by radio."

"But—but why?" an astonished pilot stuttered.

"The answer is that he is probably a good Nazi instead of an American like we thought. And since the only good Nazis is a dead Nazi, he is right now a very good Nazi."

Conklin made an expression of distaste. "I could use a drink right now. And one more thing."

He stopped and fixed them with his eye. "From now on, thirteen is our lucky number. And I don't want to hear any more about jinxes!"

FJORD OF FURY

By HAROLD F. CRUICKSHANK

Erik Denman faces desperate hazards in a bitter life-or-death struggle to wreak personal vengeance upon brutal Nazi enemies!

CHAPTER I.

BOMBER VS. RAIDER.

THE jarring crump of flak tightened Erik Denman's nerves, and under his hand the wheel of the big Wellington bomber shivered to the impact of screeching steel somewhere on the aircraft. Out of the corner of his eye the young R.A.F. flight lieutenant saw a spew of flying fragments to starboard, and he swore under his breath.

The Nazi ack-ack fire from the cliffsides of the Norwegian Fjord below was on the mark.

"I've an idea we lost a slab of wing structure that time," the voice of Terry Coles, his navigator and for this trip his bombardier, drawled into the inter-com. "Take her around again, Erik. If we can find a hole in this blasted sea mist, that surface raider is our meat."

"Right." Erik banked the plane, his eyes probing the murk for sight of the zigzagging German ship. To get that craft was worth any risk, for she was a cruiser of the *Prince Eugen* class, undoubtedly prowling here off the coast of Norway in search of Russia-bound convoys.

The fog was a sullen gray blanket over the white chop of coastal waters. The bomber took the controls, but she was sluggish, hard to handle. Anti-aircraft muzzles moved below, on the cliffsides, sniffed the wind, lay in wait for the Wellington to show again.

"Bandits astern, sir!" came the sharp warning over the inter-com from the rear gunner. "Focke-Wulf interceptors!"

"Your headache, Sergeant. Get 'em."

Erik had spotted a rift in the fog and he spoke without taking his eyes from it. The mist drew away still more, and Erik swung the bomber.

"Coming on it." The voice of Coles, the fighting Canuck, was absorbed, intent. "Right a kiss, Skip . . . Steady on . . . Bomb doors open . . . Steady on . . . As she rides . . . Now! . . . Bombs away!"

The bomber lifted as the weight let go. Then she reeled and shuddered as a terrific burst of flak, coming up, passed the bombs winging down. Erik fought the controls, brought her back to even keel, ears strained for the report. It came.

"A jolly near miss, or perhaps a bit astern, sir," the rear gunner spotted, and broke off abruptly.

The Wellington quivered as the gunner, and the waist gunners along with him, went into staccato action against the attacking Focke-Wulfs. Erik dived the ship into flanking mist and, for a breathing space, lost both flak and fighters.

"Gimme one more crack at her!" Terry Coles asked eagerly. "Try her in a for'ard attack. There she is, smoking astern. Making steerage way, and that's about all. Laying this stick smack on her turret, Skip. Bomb doors open . . . Steady on . . . on . . . Bombs away!"

"You got her, sir!" came the gunner's report, hardly audible through the new fury of exploding flak and Focke-Wulf machine-gun fire. "She's down by the stern. She—"

The voice cut out—and the rear guns were *not* firing. Erik lifted a hand to press the earphones more tightly to his head. His lips moved.

"Terry, take a look-see aft. 'Fraid Taffy Evans is out."

A sleet of machine-gun fire slammed into the instrument panel, and he tasted blood.

"I'm taking her to sea," he hurried on. "Calling in our Seafire escort from Fleet Air Arm."

"Righto." Coles moved aft.

Erik shepherded the groaning, disabled colossus of the sky lanes, apprehensive for Evans. The rear guns chattered briefly, but Erik's hope died when Terry spoke.

"I'm taking over for Taffy. He's—"

The words were lost in gunfire. Erik climbed the Wellington almost to ceiling, but the Focke-Wulf battering continued. He caught a call from the leader of a fast Seafire pursuit formation, but when he relayed the news to Coles his earphones were mute.

He sent a waist gunner back to investigate. Soon, too soon, he got his answer.

"Flying Officer Coles has copped one, sir. He's—it's finis."

"Carry on." The pilot spoke through lips numb with shock.

What happened to a man himself wasn't the worst feature of war. The thing that tore the heart out of you was losing those who had come to mean so much to you. Like Terry Coles and others, officers and C.O.'s alike. In his two years of operational flying, Erik had lost some great buddies. And now Terry.

Erik looked blindly up and around at the protecting wings of the Seafire pursuits, and back toward the rapidly receding Norwegian coast. He was fighting with every ounce of skill he possessed to keep the Wellington on her course to England, but a detached portion of his mind played with memories.

His father, later lost at sea, had been an American official at Oslo. His mother was Norwegian. The fjords had been his playground, and this particular Viking Fjord they had just left was a vivid memory. There, with his best boyhood pal, Olaf Rensvold, he had spent most of his vacations.

In one of the caves at the rock's base he had first kissed Anna Flojen, and at the fjords he had been keenly aware of the beauty of her sun-tanned skin and the spun gold of her hair as she stood on a rock after making a high dive. But jealousy had crept into his mind, for Anna seemed to lean more to Olaf.

And now his mother was a prisoner of the Nazis in Norway—or dead, perhaps. And heaven only knew what had become of Olaf and Anna.

Long, long thoughts as his hands held the controls and his eyes read the ominous message of the flickering, uncertain dial needles. One thing mattered—to be on the drive that liberated Norway. The bomber assignment today had been one of reconnaissance looking toward that end, the cruiser unexpected prey.

With the shoreline of Britain at last in sight, Erik began to wireless his station, got the okay. But when he tried to lower his landing gear, over the field, the mechanism stuck. He warned his remaining men to brace themselves for a crash landing.

The Wellington hit, bounced high, hit again with stunning, bone-shaking force and sheered her rivet heads with an agonizing slide on her belly. Erik was unconscious,

draped limp as a rag over his controls, when they lifted him out. . . .

Erik Denman was two weeks in the hospital, then got convalescent leave. He took a train for the Cotswold Hills, where his parents owned a small cottage in the country. The old Norwegian housekeeper, Martha Haugen, met him with a warm embrace.

"And I haf news, Erik!" she told him excitedly. "Another visitor is coming. Yust you wait, son. Now some Scotch and soda, yah?"

Erik kissed her plump cheek.

"Yah," he imitated. "And I don't want visitors. I want to listen—alone—to the ring-doves in the woods at dusk, and the curlews. No visitors, Martha."

It was good—and bad—to lie flat on his back in the grass, and remember, and plan. Something about the Viking Fjord kept prodding at his mind. He and Olaf had studied geology and engineering together at Harvard, and they had argued often about the wall of rock, called the Viking Gate, which lay across the fjord.

They were agreed that some earthquake disturbance had put it there, and both had wondered what the place would be like if it were not there, if the ocean water could enter the deep indentation of the fjord and form a channel between the cliffs.

Anna—lovely little Anna—had sometimes listened soberly to their talk, her blue eyes thoughtful. And it was over the girl that there had been words between him and Olaf, his friend. Olaf had escaped from Norway in a fishing smack when the Nazis took over, and had entered the R.A.F. Where was Olaf now, and what was he doing? Where was his mother—and Anna?

"Erik—Erik, old Viking!"

Erik Denman sat up with a jerk. "Olaf!"

The two men searched each other's faces and, if Erik had felt any enmity over Anna, it was banished by sight of the scar on Olaf's left cheek. They gripped hands, and Erik said:

"The scar, Olaf. A battle wound?"

Olaf shook his head, and a smile pulled at the scarred corner of his mouth.

"Sit down, Erik. I have news for you. Some good, some bad."

"Norway, Olaf? You've been back there?"

"By arrangement with your War Office and my command. Erik, the time is almost at hand. Thousands of my countrymen are ready to revolt. They are helpless for the moment, in concentration camps, but I have

been among them. I got myself sent to a camp north of Trondheim—and there I did my part to plant the seed of revolt.”

“My Mother, Olaf. Did you—”

Olaf drew a deep breath, spoke with an effort.

“Erik, boy—your mother is dead.”

Erik was beyond words for a moment.

“Tell me, Olaf,” he said then.

“The Nazis,” Olaf said slowly. “She was tried by the Gestapo—you can imagine what sort of farce it was—and adjudged guilty of sabotage. They—shot her. Erik, I—she was mother to me, too, you know.”

“Please, old man.”

Erik turned on his side, burying his face in his arms. Olaf sat beside him and put a hand on his shoulder. For long minutes neither spoke and there was no sound in the quiet woods but the occasional lonely cry of a curlew.

At length Erik stirred, sat up, running his hands through his blond hair. His eyes were still dazed, stricken, but he spoke calmly.

“Anna?”

“Anna has been tending your mother’s grave, Erik. She took me to visit the place. She is as vital as ever, but filled, as are all Norwegians, with sorrow. Her father was killed and she lost her only brother at sea.”

“I understand.”

“Anna is under suspicion, too, old Viking. But, so far, her quick wit has kept her outside the concentration camps. She plays a brave part, Erik, in work of liberation. Brave, but dangerous.”

“But I have good news, too. You remember our fjord and the wall of rock, and how we used to speculate what would happen if the sea could be let in? Well, come to the house and I’ll tell you something.”

CHAPTER II.

QUISLING TREACHERY.

FOR the next two hours, as they sipped highballs, Erik Denman listened to Olaf describe his secret mission to Norway for underground work.

“It was not a bullet or flak that scarred my face, Erik,” he said, “but the whiplash of a Gestapo guard.”

Olaf told of his escape by fishing smack, of his report to War Office, and of his recommendations for commando work.

“It all centers around the Viking Gate, Erik,” he explained. “With Anna watching,

I was able to survey the rock gate and I am convinced it can be blown clear of the fjord neck. If this is done, what more ideal landing spot for a commando force? Remember the old channel running into my father’s farm? There will be dockage there, when the seas roll in, for four destroyers. And can’t you see, Erik? If I am right the rock can be drilled and blown in one tremendous explosion!”

“But what does War Office think of the scheme?”

“That’s where you come in, Erik. You are more qualified than any man I know to make a final survey and report. If, as you always insisted, the rock is of calcareous formation, it can be blown. But I want your confirmation and report. You will come, Erik?”

“You mean I—we’re expected to sneak in there and make another survey?”

“All is arranged, Erik. Seafires will land us from a converted carrier. We—”

“Seafires? Olaf, where could we land a Seafire on that coast?”

“You remember the little barley field, Erik? Anna and her cousin, Lars, have that planted—under Nazi control, of course. I have made arrangements for an ingenious means of guiding us in—a path of phosphorous-painted stones. Their painted sides are turned down now. They will be upturned when I give my signals. . . .”

Erik was looking off into space. Olaf had mentioned Anna so much. He shrugged. It was inevitable, he supposed, and there were other things to think of now; big things. Erik’s mouth tightened. Apart from his desire to be in at the finish of the Nazi aggressors, there was now in his soul an insatiable desire to avenge the execution of his mother, to avenge Anna’s father and the many others throughout Europe. And such desires were natural and deep-rooted in the heart of the young pilot who hoped that his opportunity had come.

“When do we make final arrangements, Olaf?” he suddenly demanded.

“Whenever you feel fit enough, Erik. The sooner the better. For me—tomorrow morning. We shall be received by Headquarter’s chiefs whenever I give the word. I have done the groundwork. Your assent is all that is required, and some details to be gone over.”

“Then tomorrow it is; and Olaf, one more drink.”

Erik filled their glasses. They lifted them and silently drank a toast that was a vow

in the mind and heart of Erik Denman. As he lowered his empty glass, his eyes were filmed. His mother had been the loveliest woman he had ever seen. She had been grand in every way. She it had been who had taught him to love the great beauty of Norway, and Norway's people.

He moved off alone, out toward his favorite cove, there to plan, to visualize, to meditate, and plot with death.

Two Seafires split the dusk of the Norwegian night. Two pilots hooked up with radio connection, kept contact continuously.

"We're almost in, Olaf," Erik Denman said. "You're sure 'A' will be on hand?"

"One can never be sure, Erik. There is always the possibility that we shall have to crash land and hope for the best. I hope none of our equipment suffers."

Erik smiled. Olaf was thinking more of their survey equipment, of their food, supplies, and the Bren guns strapped to their fighter craft than he was of his own safety.

"Now, Erik, I make my signals," Olaf radioed.

Erik coned the shadowy wall of the Viking Gate down below. Beyond was the flat of the old barley field, running back to the spruce timber, and pines.

An eye of light winked from below. Infinitesimal almost, but definitely a sign.

"Anna has the signal, Erik," Olaf radioed in code. "We'll make one complete turn, and ess down. Not much room—let me go first. . . . The path, Erik! Do you see it?"

Erik saw it, dim, but discernible, the ingenious path of painted stones which, to outwit the Nazis, had been placed in the field as boundaries of the vegetable plots.

Olaf led in. It was hazardous at best, but he was inspired, as was Erik, by the big stakes for which they were playing.

Erik's heart thumped fiercely. Shortly he would meet her again—Anna, the only girl he had ever loved! But now he had to give his whole attention to the job of essing the fast Seafire down.

Olaf's craft had vanished from his sight. But instructions were to straddle the line of phosphorous-painted rocks.

Erik touched the stick down. He almost stopped breathing as he felt his tires kiss. The Seafire bounced high, but settled at last and he slammed left rudder hard, in order to avoid a ground loop.

Scarcely conscious that he had landed safely, Erik sat a moment in bewilderment, but suddenly came alert. There was a lot to

do. Although this spot was so isolated, these sky motors had made a terrific racket. Had the formation of R.A.F. bombers which had roared over simultaneously drowned out the noise of the Seafire motors? He dropped to the ground. Olaf was coming up. . . . There was a shadowy form at Olaf's side, and Erik felt his pulses quicken.

"Anna!" The name was on his tongue, but it was not uttered, for it was not Anna.

"This is Lars, Anna's cousin," Erik said, and he was shaking. "Anna—they have got her at last. She was taken last night! Erik, you hear me?"

"They've—got Anna, too? Olaf! I'm sorry, old Viking! But perhaps we can—"

"Let's get our equipment cleared and cached, Erik, as quickly as possible," Olaf cut in. "Then we must fire the aircraft. Lars tells me there are jackals about—the jackals of Quisling. We must work quickly and get our report to Navy—"

They worked furiously to get their equipment cached, then from the nearby woods, where they had set up their two Bren guns, they watched their Seafires burn. . . .

In the cool dawn, spray-drenched, Erik Denman moved about the base of the big rock gate. During the night he had listened to the heavy seas hammer its face, or sea wall, and wondered if he could ever carry to successful completion the plan Olaf had started.

While Olaf and Lars conducted a reconnaissance along the only old farm road out toward Trondheim, Erik carefully began his survey. Soon he found signs of erosion, where weather had dug into the face of the calcareous rock formation, into soft clay and sandstone.

This was good! Such pockets were ideal spots for spudding in explosives. He climbed the rock, a feat which at his first attempt years ago, had cost him a broken leg, and looked down over the sea wall front. He glimpsed the dark recesses of small caves, further marks of erosion. In time, perhaps, the great Viking Wall would have been defeated by the heavy barrage of the pounding sea.

He was satisfied that Olaf's scheme was capable of execution. Climbing down, he made many notes and calculations in the growing light. Suddenly he stopped. He was standing on the rock where he had last seen Anna—Anna with her spun-gold hair penning in the breeze after a swim.

He moved slowly down to the little cave

where he had first told Anna he loved her. Above the pounding of his heart he barely heard the scrape of boots on the rock surface at his back. Instinctively he ducked as he heard something whirl through space. A flying object caught him in the shoulder as he ducked away.

He crashed forward, but caught a shelf of rock and spun as a shadowy form leaped toward him. Erik's hand flew to the automatic at his belt. He caught a dim glimpse of the man, the face, and gasped as he pulled the trigger. Lars! Anna's cousin, Lars, in whom Olaf had placed to much trust.

"You Quisling swine!" Erik gasped as the big man went down on his face—dead. "Little wonder my mother was sold to the execution squad, or that Anna is now in their hands!"

His left shoulder pained him, but he moved out, stepping over the big laborer in the homespun clothing. This attempt on his life didn't augur well for the success of his own and Olaf's mission.

Erik moved stealthily back to the old stone farmhouse, his automatic ready. What of Olaf? If Lars had killed him, Erik would be alone, and—

Suddenly he glimpsed Olaf coming toward the house from another direction. With him was a big, lumbering man, a replica of the man Erik had just killed.

"Erik, was that a shot I heard?" Olaf asked.

Erik looked sharply at Olaf's companion, scarcely believing his eyes.

"Who is this man, Olaf?" Erik jerked the automatic toward the fellow.

"Lars, of course . . . Erik—what's happened?"

"Then who was the man who looks like his twin—the man who tried to kill me at the cave?"

Olaf spun round on Lars and spoke sharply. The big fellow nodded, and his large hands balled into hamlike fists. He swore gruffly.

"It must be Sten, Lars' half-brother, Erik. But what happened? You've been hurt."

"I had to kill him, Olaf. He attempted to kill me. We've run into a most unhealthy beginning. We'd better get some food into us and run over my notes."

In the stone house they studied Erik's notes and calculations. Shortly they would run levels to confirm Erik's hasty calculations.

"I see you were and are right, Erik," Olaf conceded. "You think the scheme practicable?"

Erik nodded. "That will be my report. The rest is up to the engineers who come in by bomber. They'll put MacDonald in charge of drilling. He's good. I've worked with him in the States. But this job will have to be quickly started."

* * * * *

Erik's report had been radioed in code to a cruiser standing off the fjord. Now Erik and Olaf were watching for the coming of the Lancasters and Wellingtons, bringing in the engineers with their supplies and infantry commando guards.

The roar of heavy motors was heard. A formation of bombers was heading in, south of the Viking Fjord, to draw enemy craft and general attention away from British parachutists.

Erik Denman knew that a red inferno could erupt at the old farmstead at any moment. Erik and Olaf were posted at the Bren guns, ready to go into action at a second's notice. Lars was down the old road, to intercept any stalking enemy or Quisling movement from that point.

The bombers came in, and Erik clicked open his transmitter, secretly housed in a pocket of rock by the woods. He gave the pilots a line on the stone path in the barley field. The big craft snored around and then, etched against the starry sky, chutists appeared like weird shapes from another world.

Chuted equipment was swaying down. Erik Denman suddenly darted forward. A man had struck the ground. He knew who that would be!

"Losh, what a landing! I . . . Weel, if it isn't Erik himself!"

A throaty chuckle came from Major Jack MacDonald of the Engineers. Erik squeezed his hand warmly.

"Nice flying, Mac. I'll help you off with your harness. We've got to act swiftly, sir. You know that, of course."

An hour and a half later, an infantry lieutenant had posted his machine-gunners at strategic positions. Olaf was talking to him.

"I am in touch with the Norwegians at the concentration camp, Lieutenant Travers," Olaf said. "Just as soon as the major thrust starts, and we have fighting equipment, those men, under a naval commodore, will assume the roles of fighting guerrillas. You will take them over. They

are being well-coached by Commodore Jensvak. The fight may be bloody, but it will be great—great!”

Travers lit a cigarette and smiled. “My boys are just spoiling to be in there, Rensvold. About fifty per cent of them are Norwegian-Canucks—commandos, ready for anything.”

Olaf moved on down to where Major MacDonald and Erik Denman were going over levels again. With the aid of a hooded flash lamp, Erik was pointing out the formation.

“Aye, I see ye’re right, Erik, son,” MacDonald was saying. “Ye seldom make mistakes. I’m an engineer, not a geologist. Mine’s the practical end. Rensvold and yersel’ supply the brains, I supply the practice and the TNT. It’s a big job, mind ye, but I’ve got some of the best demolitions men in Britain wi’ me. What I have in mind is intermittent bursts at various levels. This rock’s a big weight tae shift at one blast . . . I’ll time my fuses so that I blow a lot of the upper weight off a second or so before the main base charges.”

Erik nodded, his eyes bright with anticipation. This was a tremendous moment in his life.

CHAPTER III.

STORMING INTO BATTLE.

As the tide ebbed, rope slings were fashioned and Erik and MacDonald swung themselves over the sea face of the Gate to make a closer inspection. They returned satisfied that the job could be done.

“But I dinna imagine for a minute that we’re going tae get away with this drillin’ without a visit from the Heinies, mind ye, Erik,” Mac cautioned. “Our force of machine-gunners is no’ sae very big, sae the sooner we get at this, the better. I’ll put my crews tae work on the base charge drillin’ at once. . . .”

Mac called up his senior N.C.O. and issued instructions. Electric drills were in action, operated by spudders from slings over the sea face side, deep into the muck at the base of the gate.

Erik measured MacDonald’s calculations with Olaf.

“He knows what he’s doing, Olaf. I saw him at work on a big dam project for the Mexican government shortly after I gradu-

ated. If Mac can’t blow the Gate, nobody can.”

They moved off, for they had other plans. Their hope was to rescue Anna, but they had to find out where she was. With the coming of dark they slipped past the silent commando guards, toward the nearest village, ten miles distant.

Clothed as rough peasants, they stole into the village, where Olaf had loyal friends. They entered a cottage of stone where an oldster sat smoking some strange mixture of dried herbs. An elderly woman, pale and gaunt, entered from the kitchen. Olaf kissed her and introduced her as his aunt, his father’s eldest sister.

“And what news, if any, of Anna?” Olaf questioned.

His uncle coughed and shot a tear-dimmed glance at his drawn-faced wife.

“She has had her trial, Olaf,” the aunt said. “There is no hope. She is here at the village and before forty-eight hours, she is to be—” She made a helpless gesture, and the look in her eyes stirred Erik Denman.

“Get word to her, somehow, without too much risk to yourself, that Erik is here,” Olaf said. “He—he will find a way. It will give her heart, for—she loves Erik. You’ll get word?”

The old lady nodded.

“There is always a way to fool these swine, Olaf. I will a hen take to the guards—an old fowl but boiled to softness, and spiced. They are gluttons. Yess, I will find a way.”

They shook hands and moved out, stealthily, for the Gestapo were always alert.

On their way back, Erik wondered about Olaf’s message to Anna, but he kept silent. Olaf had placed the responsibility for Anna’s rescue on his, Erik’s, shoulders. Why?

They came up with Travers and had a word.

“The ruddy place is haunted, chaps,” the lieutenant whispered. “Keep hearing things creeping through the pines. I’ll be glad when we can leap into some sort of open action. Sorry, but one of my men had to slit a civilian’s throat about an hour ago. Fellow couldn’t give a fair account of his presence here. Don’t know what might happen if and when his Quisling pals miss him. Luck to you chaps at the rock. Don’t worry about us—we’ll be in there.”

Erik and Olaf rejoined Mac who was

working in his shirt sleeves, driving, cajoling, hustling his men.

"We've only another low tide left for the job, boys. This whole scheme depends on time . . . Into the collars, all o' ye!"

He turned and spoke to Olaf and Erik.

"Reconnaissance aircraft went over a short time ago, boys," he said. "We took cover, but you never can tell. Wily lads, these Nazis."

"Think you'll have her spudded by next flow, Major?" Erik asked.

"Aye, I do. Otherwise we might as well chuck the job . . . That'll be, say three hours, ten minutes o' the morning. Better contact Navy an' get your order in for the raiders. Then do a little prayin' that we aren't bombed and all our work undone. Man dear! This is going to be tremendous, an' it'll only be a taste of the action that will strike in every occupied country!" He glanced at Erik sympathetically. "And ye're in a bonny spot tae avenge your mother's death. Erik, boy. Luck tae ye!"

In the little village where Anna Flojen was incarcerated, Olaf's aunt moved to the guardhouse with her covered basket. She was here to bargain. She was fortunate enough to have a knowledge of German, and a way with her that would have been coveted by many a younger woman.

"Ach, lieber Gott!" a guard exploded. "So you are back, Frau! What is it this time?"

"Food for you, great one. *Lieber Gott*. I must not see my friends starve, *nicht wahr!*"

The guard chuckled.

"Food for me, or for the little *Teufel* cat?"

"There is no need of food for the little one," the old lady replied. "Food for you and your corporal. But it is a bribe. I want to talk to the little one—just a word or two. Some spiritual comfort, for her end is near."

The guard passed the old lady to the corporal, who fell for the bribe.

"But only for a few minutes, Frau Olstag," the non-com asserted. "The *Kommandant* is most severe about these things. Leave your basket and Franz will let you in."

In a few moments, Frau Olstag was closeted with Anna. She stroked her hair, and wiped a tear from the girl's cheek.

"Have hope, faith, little one," she crooned. "He is here—Erik!"

"Erik! You mean—no, not Erik Denman, Frau Olstag."

"But I do mean, Erik, and with him is Olaf. Little one, at high tide tomorrow morning, their work will be done. I can't tell you about it. But at the Viking Fjord the Allies are about to strike hard. Our men at the camp will be liberated. It will be a dawn of fury, Anna! Watch, and wait. Be ready!"

The old lady kissed the girl, and Anna was overcome by a storm of emotion.

"You have a message for Erik, should I see him again, or perhaps for Olaf?" Frau Olstag asked, as she gathered her tattered shawl about her.

"A message for them both, Frau Olstag. Tell them I shall pray for them—say that I shall be ready!"

And as the light from the outer guard room flooded her face momentarily, Anna's eyes sparkled with a new hope—a hope not only for herself, but for Norway and her people, and for the people of other occupied countries. Her lips moved, for she was praying. . . .

Coded messages burned the ether, from Erik Denman's transmitter to Navy, and on to the R.A.F.

"Three hours, ten minutes . . . Three hours, ten minutes."

That was the zero hour—nine hours away.

MacDonald reported that his last charges were fused and his batteries ready. But the whole zone about the farmstead was charged with electric tension. Engineers and commandos were on the *qui vive*.

Two German Junkers reconnaissance planes had come in low over the zone shortly after dawn, and it seemed to the watchers that darkness would never fully settle. An eerie quiet was over the whole zone, for not yet had the flood tide begun to pound the drilled rock wall.

Midnight finally dragged by. Erik Denman drank almost continuously of the cold spring water. His throat and mouth seemed parched.

Erik was standing by his transmitter when he caught the sound of sky motors. He started, for he knew they were Nazis. He broke away and warned officers and men.

"Stand by to take cover! I'm afraid these cursed Nazis were wise to us all along, but waited until we had our installations in before they came over. Watch your men down the road, Lieutenant Travers! There

may be an attack from inshore at any moment."

"We're ready, Denman! I'm just going along to take over now. I—"

The stutter of a Bren gun cut him off. Its chatter seemed to be the cue to the opening concerto which broke simultaneously.

Out of the skylanes there came the whistle of a stick of bombs. The ground quaked. Men were flung back hard into their rock cover caves.

Old MacDonald snarled an oath as a chip of flying rock struck him sharply in the shoulder. What he and Erik had feared most was happening. The Nazis had craftily bided their time to strike a counter blow. With the hope of undoing all the work of the British, they had deferred their attack until this psychological moment. Now, on land, from down the old farm trail, and from the sky over the farmstead they poured their venom in with murderous bomb and gunfire.

Erik rushed out to find Olaf, but Lars informed him that Olaf had gone along the road with a group of commandos, equipped with tommy-guns.

Erik groaned, for he realized that they were already cut off, by the Nazi gunfire. He dropped sharply as a hail of machine-gun lead cut over the post. He dropped at the grip of the Bren gun, the spare, one of those he and Olaf had brought. A shadowy form loomed over a rise in the road. There was a spurt of flame from a Nazi automatic rifle. Erik squeezed his trigger. Arms were flung upward, then flopped helplessly to the German gunner's sides.

During the thirty minutes of furious fighting that followed, Erik was trapped at his post. Four of Travers' men fought their way to his post at last, and took over. Erik moved back slowly, carefully, his automatic ready, hoping to get to MacDonald. Nazis had crept through the woods, and probably were at every turn in the road.

He reached the farmhouse just as a stick of bombs crashed close to the Viking wall. Erik's heart leaped madly. Would all MacDonald's wiring be cut? If that happened, the whole venture would be ruined!

He stole a glance at his watch. Twenty minutes to go, before zero hour. He crept to the cave in which Mac had installed his batteries. Mac challenged him, then chuckled, as was his custom in a tense moment.

"Losh, what a night, Erik! Caught us off the bag, so it has. I can't tell the damage that's been done till I press my electric button. If ye ever prayed, son, pray now, for luck. Time check, Erik."

"Three hours, one minute, Mac. Chin up! There'll be night fighter craft of ours in shortly, from Fleet Air Arm . . . By the way, Olaf's missing. He went down the road with the Commandos. Tough luck, for we had a job at the village—a joint job, Mac. I—"

He broke off as a merciless deluge of heavy bombs crashed in, not far away.

"Weel, that was to the south of the Gate, son," Mac intoned. "I've noticed that Jerry's fire hasn't been too accurate. Not a blessed hit on the rock itself yet, I'm thinking . . . Time, Erik."

"Three hours, seven minutes, Mac . . . I'm going to check with Navy. Luck!"

"Better be under cover when I touch this button," Mac cautioned.

Erik sped away, flattening now and then as a bomb burst showered the zone with flying rock. He tuned in and picked up the commodore of the destroyer flotilla.

"Time check, sir," he wirelessed. "Three hours, eight minutes. We're under heavy sky strafe and land action engagement."

"We're on our way in," came the acknowledgment. "We have your check on channel depth. That's adequate."

Suddenly, Erik Denman felt the ground quake. It shook like a huge jelly before the first monstrous eruption which drowned out all other sounds. Almost before Erik had recovered from this shock, another and another more monstrous explosion thundered.

MacDonald had pressed the button!

Erik ventured a glance out of his cave. He stood aghast. He was looking through a cleft, seaward, where a brief moment ago had stood a solid wall of rock. Now the heavy seas rolled in. Flying debris, rocks of prodigious weights, were splashing into the sea, or onto the land.

Erik laughed hysterically. But suddenly he broke off at a new roar, a familiar roar, as a formation of Seafires thundered in, their guns blasting wide out. The forerunners of the Commando, Navy and Air Force raid of liberation!

Inland, the chatter of rifle and machine-gun fire was intense. Erik heard the shouts of men. He also heard a strange singing, singing he had not heard since his boyhood, when he had listened to the Norwegian lum-

bermen returning from the woods, singing the song of the vikings.

It was that song he heard now, and it dawned on him—the concentration camp had been delivered of its men! Norway's fighting sons were storming into battle!

CHAPTER IV.

SALUTE TO COURAGE.

ERIK thrilled at the toots of the first destroyer's air siren. He raced toward the Viking Fjord, along the right bank of the new channel, where MacDonald and his men had rigged up stanchions of rock to take the ships' lines.

It was a grand sight to see the first destroyer come in, her ack-ack guns flaming, illuminating the entire fjord—truly a fjord of fury.

Erik listened to the roar of Lancaster motors, and the deep-throated sounds of other British bombers. It was a *night* of fury also. Soon would come the crash of bombs.

Erik met and shook the hand of the commodore who came with the first destroyer.

"Congratulations, sir," the young flight lieutenant said, as he gripped the old seagog's hand. "A splendid job of timing."

"Never mind the compliments, laddie," the gruff old commodore said. "We've a job of work to do. I know who is due for all the compliments when the proper time comes."

Erik was thrilled at the sight of the tanks ready to roar down their ramps, and at the huddled figures on deck, grim-lipped men in full equipment ready to leap ashore into battle.

But suddenly Erik thought of Olaf—and of Anna.

"All I've had is a piece of an executive job," he growled. "I'd hoped, Olaf, that you and I could have gone in together. I—"

He turned and spoke to the commodore.

"I'll signal you by lamp, sir."

Erik was thinking of probable naval gunfire support for Travers' men and for his new guerrilla supporters so recently liberated.

He moved up to Lars' post again. Lars was wounded, and two of the commandos at his side killed.

"They are pressing us back, sir," Lars was saying when a messenger leaped into the post, with word from Lieutenant Travers.

"Falling back we are, sir. Need artillery, or mortar support. Terribly outnumbered!

If we could only have one good ten-minute barrage of shrap or H.E., that would do us."

"Can you give me your exact location, runner?" Erik asked.

"Yes, sir. Right where the road turns sharply into the woods."

"Have Lieutenant Travers withdraw his men a hundred yards this way. I'll signal the destroyers. Watch your heads up there and tell the lieutenant to keep a check on the released Norwegians."

Within three minutes Erik was back on a height of land flashing range to the commodore.

Shortly, a terrific burst of flame gushed from the Viking Fjord of Fury. Salvo after salvo was spewed from the guns of all four destroyers. But now came the roar of tanks, and overhead there was the thunder of sky motors as the main force of British bombers roared in, to take care of the enemy power installations and airfield at Trondheim. . . .

Erik Denman quaked with strain and excitement as a couple of fast medium tanks roared by him. He wanted to leap aboard to hunt for Olaf and Anna. He wanted to strike a blow in vengeance, for his mother.

Infantry surged by, following the tanks under the arc of sparking shells from the destroyers.

Erik moved back toward the farmstead, toward his transmitter. Suddenly he detected a movement off to his right. He had to skirt the new deep channel the plunging high tide had made in the old farmland, at right angles to the barley field.

Stealthily forms were creeping up. Erik saw one form detach itself. He moved behind a tree and identified a Nazi officer. Slowly he crept up on the Nazi.

"A *Kommandant* of the Gestapo, eh?" Erik breathed. "Well, you slinking devil, you're for it!"

The sound of heavy clumping boots grew clearer as Erik crouched, his hand tightening on his automatic. Suddenly he leaped. There was a spurt of flame from the German's gun. Erik felt a bullet whistle by. Another slit the skin of his side just under the left arm.

But with demoniac fury, the young Norwegian-Yank struck a savage blow with the barrel of his heavy automatic. The big lumbering officer collapsed almost at his feet like a sack of wet wash.

Quickly Erik knelt and made an examination.

"You're alive, you swine! I should have

killed you. But that will keep. I'll truss you up and hand you over to the commodore, the senior officer of this show. Now I—"

There was a roar of voices from the woods. The crash of rifles. Men were in battle! Firmly gripping his automatic, Erik darted toward the deeper woods, but he stopped suddenly in his tracks. Two people were running toward him. One of them was Anna! He was sure it was Anna.

He called her name. She raised her face, but stumbled and fell. And as Erik Denman, his whole being quivering, dropped to his knees beside her, Olaf Rensvold, bloody and tattered, staggered forward to slump near Anna's side. . . .

At the farmhouse half an hour later, Erik Denman watched the face of a naval surgeon as he bent over Anna Flojen.

The M.O. turned and smiled at Erik.

"All right, I think, old chap. Shock, mostly. Hunger perhaps, and exhaustion. . . . But the other—I—I am sorry to have to tell you that your friend is dead. Two bullet wounds in the body and another severing an artery in the thigh. . . . Oh! The lady is coming to. Stand by."

Erik watched Anna's eyelids flutter, then open to stare vaguely at first, unseeing. The surgeon kept his fingertips on her pulse, smiled and nodded at Erik. He turned then and moved on out of doors.

"Anna—little Anna," Erik called softly.

A faint smile touched the corners of her pale mouth, then slowly her lips parted.

"Erik! Olaf told me. Erik—it was you, always you."

He gathered her gently into his arms, but as a gruff voice sounded from a corner of the room, he laid Anna back on her stretcher and whirled. The sound had come from the Gestapo officer.

Erik started. The man had wriggled free of his bonds. He had the bestial look of some animal about to attack. A frightened cry escaped Anna.

"Erik! Erik! It is *Kommandant* von Stanzertz—the man who ordered your mother's—"

They leaped together and again Erik Denman's automatic barrel struck, but the Nazi was quick. He lifted a heavy boot, which caught Erik in the groin. Erik almost went down, but a faint cry from Anna brought him up, stifling his pain.

The Gestapo chief had seized one of the surgeon's instruments and was about to leap when Erik jerked up his gun hand.

"For you—Mother!" the young R.A.F. pilot cried as he pressed his trigger.

Then he sank slowly down into unconsciousness.

It was Major Mac's voice that aroused Erik.

Better see if ye can't dae something for yon pilot aloft, Erik," the major called. "I doubt something's wrong topside. Yon laddie's looking for a spot tae land his Wellington."

Erik came out of his fog, alert. He had suffered no serious hurt and had subsided through shock chiefly.

He was out of the farm building like a shot.

His transmitter! He must get up a message of instructions to that pilot who was likely wounded!

He reached the set and tuned in.

"Hold your head, Wellington, and—take her round again, to come in from the south. Land astride the line of rocks in the field! Straddle the rocks. . . . What's your trouble up there? Over to you."

"Pilot and navigator out, sir," came the grim reply. "I've had a few hours piloting only, before my washout to air-gunnery. Give me help, sir, and I'll land her. Over!"

Erik Denman thrilled with great admiration for that nery youngster topside.

"Ground calling you! Throttle down a notch now. . . . Not too much. You're on your landing path. . . . Hold your nose up a bit. . . . Up a bit and stand by to brake her and switch off when I give the word. . . . Steady on! Right rudder a kiss. Steady. . . . steady!"

Erik intoned and wanted to shut his eyes for that brief moment of impact when the big bomber's landing gear struck.

"Brakes! Switch her off!"

It was done, and the great crippled ship came to a stop. Men of the Navy followed Erik along to the craft. Out of it came the one live crew member, a kid scarcely twenty years of age, who had brought down the ship of death. Erik flung an arm about his shoulders and hugged him in his excitement.

"Grand show, Bud! You'll be hearing more about it. Come along to the farmhouse and have a spot of rum and some chuck. We'll be taking off shortly—just you and I."

They gave the gunner a medical inspection at the house, then some food.

Erik moved over to Anna who was now wonderfully recovered. He held her hand.

"You know Olaf has gone, Anna?" he said softly.

She nodded and blinked her eyes.

"I knew he would go, Erik. It happened when we made the break from the village. Ah-h-h! If you could have seen it! The men from the camp fighting in the streets—freed men, who will go into the hills now, properly armed, and properly fed, to await the final day . . . Erik, Olaf sent a message to you. He told me to be sure to tell you that it was always you I loved. That is my message, too."

Erik bent and kissed her.

"You will go back with me, Anna, to Britain?"

Her eyes filled with tears, but she nodded.

"If there is transportation, Erik, I have done what I could for my country and am tired now. Together, with so much help, we have meted out grim revenge, Erik. You avenged the execution of your mother—and my father . . . Listen! Ah—but the pounding of your bombs at Trondheim! It is merciless, yet just and right. It will force those swine out of our country and then . . . Erik, you will come back here with me?"

"Right, Anna. We shall dive from the rocks again, and shall build a cairn for Olaf—together. Now are you ready to leave?"

"Leave, Erik? But the destroyers will not be leaving for some time?"

"We go by plane, Anna. That bomber which landed. I can navigate and pilot her home. You shall see, Anna, the work of our power from the sky. You are not afraid?"

She smiled softly and shook her head.

Inside an hour, Erik helped Anna aboard the Wellington. He had gained formal permission so to do from the commodore. He was also taking back two or three badly wounded commandos. With Lars he had left arrangements for Olaf's burial.

He shook Lars' hand now and said:

"You have been grand, old Viking. Anna and I will come back to you. Good-by!"

A tattoo, sharp, high-pitched, came from the destroyers' sirens as Erik waved from the doorway of his cabin. At his side sat Anna,

while leaning over was the sergeant air-gunner who had so marvelously brought the Wellington down with no serious injury to her.

"Up we go!" Erik sang out. "Hang on, and pray!"

He gave her the gun and started down the rocking runway, his eyes slitted and his lips firmly set. Now he backsticked a trifle, touched in another notch of throttle, and lifted her over the treetops like a huge bird which had just won new freedom.

They climbed to three thousand feet, and Erik turned inland. He nodded to Anna.

"The village, Anna—almost the village of death for you. And there, in the smoke, where our bombers are still at work, is the Nazi power plant. It is terrible, Anna?"

She nodded. "Terrible, yes, but necessary, Erik. It is the only way to exterminate rats—to clear all occupied countries of them."

"Now look, Anna. The Viking Fjord—the Fjord of Fury. We will go back over it and dip our nose in special salute to Olaf, and to the other brave ones who gave their lives."

Erik set his nose down in salute. His eyes dimmed, but quickly he jerked up his head and backsticked the ship for altitude. The job was done! Anna was wiping her eyes.

"I will get a special leave, Anna, and we can go to my Mother's home in the hills. You'll like that, eh? Mother would have liked it?"

Anna nodded. She was watching Erik as he fought his ship through an area of typical fjord weather. And she was giving thanks for the deliverance of her people, so far, and the avenging of one so sweet as Christina Denman, and many others like her.

Soon she was asleep, and as Erik glanced at her, he turned and shot a glance at the sergeant whose whole attention was absorbed by the girl's glorious hair.

"We'll be married soon, Sergeant. Be best man for me?"

"Right you are, sir! A pleasure. But I'd better scramble back aft to a gun position. We've got a spot of precious cargo aboard."



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