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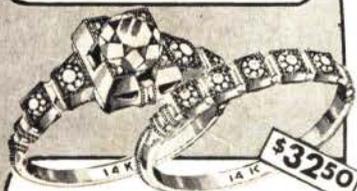
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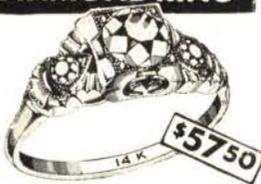


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Vol. 17

Contents for September, 1937

No. 2

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 The story of Tex Brand who fought alone against the heavy odds of Hate, and whose wings wore the rotten red stains of Murder! But a man can fly far when courage sits beside him, and when he has a date to kill or to die against the Raiders of Death!

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Their Tiny Light Kept Life Aglow



Entombed 11 Days in Moose River Mine, Scadding Now Tells How Pair Survived



"Our miner's lamp went out when the mine crashed around us on Sunday night," writes C. A. Scadding, one of the two survivors of Moose River, the most famous mine rescue in history, in telling of critical moments that dragged into 11 despairing days in the crumbling underground blackness, 142 feet below the surface.

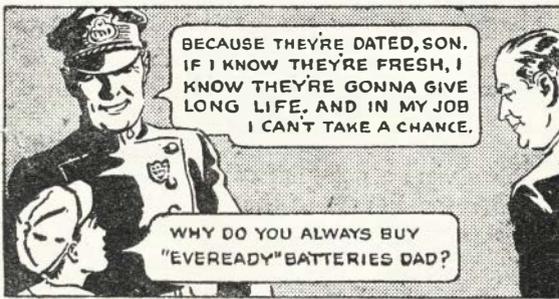
"From then until other flashlights, candles and matches were lowered to us through the drill hole on the following Sunday, our only source of light was the 'Eveready' Boy Scout flashlight I had brought for an emergency. It was just as wet as we were at all times, and without its light I would never have been able to even locate the drill hole, much less to get to it for the food and medicine that kept the doctor and myself alive. The hole broke through 40 feet away from us and to get to it required a dangerous crawl through broken rocks and

timbers and down the shaft about 18 feet. If that flashlight had failed us during that horrible week, the doctor and I would not be alive today. But for those fresh DATED 'Eveready' batteries the heroic work of the rescue crew would have been in vain. (Signed)

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Journey to Nowhere

THINGS happen so swiftly, so magically in Aviation, that it is difficult to deal with them as news. As we go to press, we have most recently been astounded by the Russians, three daring guys who go by the intricate tags of Chekalov, Baidukov, and Beliakov. It is far simpler to praise these names than to pronounce them, so we shall work at that for a while.

It isn't so long ago that most of us can't remember it quite vividly, when Commander Richard Byrd used to take himself to the two Poles, all dressed up like a Christmas package. It was a mammoth undertaking, as it still is. But in those not too distant days it was a laborious matter, and when a man set his foot on the North Pole it became a matter for loud international cheering. We used to hear stories of tremendous hardships, of men heroic in the face of frigid death. They were stories that would freeze the hearts of timid men, and we hung on every word.

Today, however, the Russians go over the Pole like three other men going out for a Sunday ride. There is practically no announcing of their intentions, no previous fanfare of publicity. Just the sound of wings over the Pacific Coast and a giant bird settling down—then the men who ride the bird announcing very calmly what they have accomplished. Well, the Russians did a good job. There can be no argument about it. It doesn't matter particularly whether they were Russians, Chinamen or Eskimos. They did it, and they did it right.

But just about the time we get to thinking that these Russians are pretty fancy birdmen, we hear the respected and reliable voice of Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh, telling of a strange man out on our western plains who is doing very strange things, indeed.

Once upon a time we thought that rockets were a noisy bit of nuisance reserved for the Fourth of July. Sometimes they went off and sometimes they didn't, and sometimes they would set a neighbor's house on fire.

But Professor Robert Hutchings Goddard of Clark University, has different kinds of rockets, distinctly not "rackets."



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Of course, this item is not news, but it will bear repetition for those who have not considered this phenomenal and revolutionary form of sky travel. Already, the good professor's rockets have traveled short distances, and the mechanics of the thing are being each day made more clear.

It is well to consider Colonel Lindbergh's words that "From a standpoint of science, the rocket offers the only known probability of sending instruments to altitudes above those reached by sounding balloons"

And we, too, should like to make a prediction, and that is this: That some day, and before most of us are sealed in our coffins, the brave, unselfish efforts of Professor Goddard will be rewarded. Perhaps not he, but one of his successors, will complete a rocket that will travel over this earth at speeds that will make the great planes of today seem like toys.

And as Lindbergh suggests, the future may know of rockets that will explode from the earth and travel on into infinite space. The only hitch being, as the Colonel also suggests, that they mightn't be able to stop the darn things and the luckless rider will disappear into a clutter of stars. You think we're kidding? Just wait around, friends, and the day will arrive. The editors of this magazine wish Professor Goddard and the good men who are assisting him, every success in this scientific venture. May it end in the enrichment of us all

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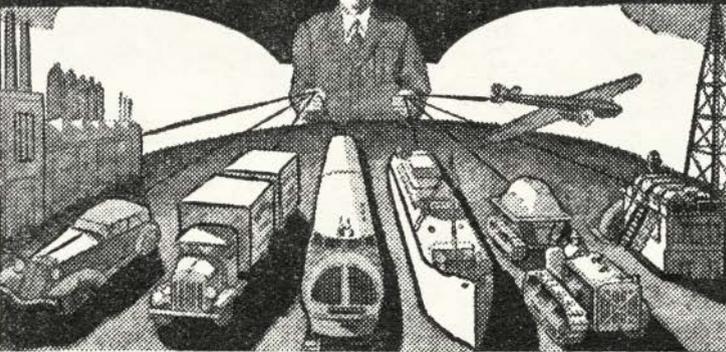
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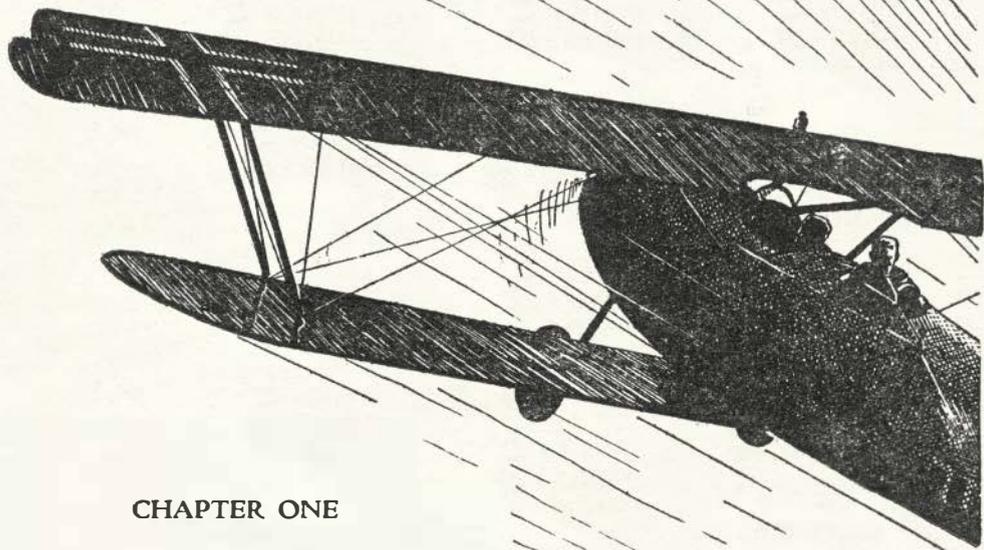
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CHAPTER ONE

C.O.'s, Beware

DARK clouds boiled across the afternoon sky, pushed by the seething rush of a rising wind. Thunder muttered ominously, to be echoed from the gloomy earth by the deadlier growl of heavy guns. For a moment the fading sun slid from between two cloud banks, slanting a shaft of golden light across the wings of the speeding Spad. The sunbeam flicked across tri-colored cocardes and glittered briefly on the dark features of Captain Tex Brand, senior Flight Leader of the 77th American Pursuit Squadron.

Brand crouched there in the cockpit that cramped his huge body, muscular hands on stick and throttle, inscrutable black eyes flicking the shadowy sky with lightning glances. His set face was a mask that gave no hint of whatever thoughts might be in his brain. Even in the split-second that the light touched him the reason for his reputation could be seen. In the sector in which the 77th



Tex Brand wore the pallor of prison walls on his cheeks, and the hatred of a marked man in his heart. Hunted, despised and pursued by Death, the big man fought alone, beside the guns that were his only friends against the Raiders of Death! But the fires of War can change a man and twist the hand of Fate, as the Spandaus chant their unholy song across the bloody skies!

**A dark shape dove over them,
as bullets fell in a deadly rain!**



operated, Tex Brand was known as a savage, merciless fighter, a killer. It was evident to those who knew him that Brand was a man driven by some dark, bitter purpose.

Suddenly, even above the roar of the thundering Hispano, his quick ears caught the heavier rumbling from the menacing clouds. He straightened in the cockpit and ripped off the close-fitting helmet. The slip-stream blew violently against his face, ruffled the mane of black hair. Then Tex Brand smiled, the smile of a man who is tasting freedom. Freedom can be very sweet to a man who had spent years in a dark gray cell.

This solitary patrol was an ordinary thing to Brand, and as usual his flight had been an aimless patrol over the lines. Now that fuel was running low he knew he must go down, and hated the thought of it. Only in the air did his newly won freedom seem secure and permanent. For that reason he spent every available moment in lone flights.

Already he had crossed into Allied territory, and now, studying familiar landmarks below, he keeled the Spad into a steep dive. Down over La Fourchette, with the shattered church tower flitting beneath his left wing. A field appeared, a long smooth field flanked by hangars and tents and a huge, rambling building that had once been a museum, but now housed the officers of the 77th. The Spad redressed, came into the wind with a graceful swoop. The wheels touched, the scout drifted to a stop fifty yards from the center hangar.

Captain Kelsey, adjutant of the 77th, stopped Brand as he moved toward the mess building. Like the rest of the commissioned personnel of the 77th, Kelsey regarded Brand with a sort of awe.

"You didn't see anything of the Old Man while you were gone, did you?"

Brand lighted a cigarette, allowed twin streams of smoke to drift from his

nostrils. Then he looked at Kelsey.

"See Bell? Why should I see the Major?"

"He's gone," Kelsey explained uneasily. "Got a telephone call, and rushed his ship out. That was an hour ago; he hasn't come back. He acted pretty mysterious about the message, whatever it was. You know how the C. O. is about flying; he doesn't indulge unless it's absolutely necessary."

"He'll be back," Brand said shortly. "No chance of anything else. I don't see why you're so jumpy about it."

"I don't either," Kelsey admitted sheepishly. "It's just a hunch; sounds silly, but with that storm coming up I sorta—"

"Your nerves are shot," Brand told him with brutal directness. "You talk like an old woman!"

Despite his words, he glanced at the boiling sky and a shiver coursed down his spine. Something intangible rode the moaning wind, something that bore a definite note of evil, of impending disaster.

"He's not such a hot pilot," the adjutant was insisting. "He might have cracked up—"

Brand tossed away the half-burned butt. "Okay, if it'll make you feel any better I'll grab a swig of coffee and take a look. Tell Gibbons to gas up my bus, will you?"

Brand strode into the long mess room, and an attendant brought a pot of steaming black coffee. The flight leader swallowed the powerful black brew, stamped back to his ship. A moment later he zoomed into the gathering darkness and was lost to sight.

For an hour he swung in a great circle of which the 77th's drome was the center. There was no sign of a crash that he could see, no trace of a forced landing. Kelsey was jittery, he told himself. Major Bell probably had known what he was

doing. When the darkness had totally obscured the earth, Brand swung back toward the field.

He came in high above the drome, blurping his motor as a signal for landing flares. In the short intervals during which the Hisso was silent the blackness of the night pressed against him with almost tangible force. He started to glide lower, then—

Brand had no warning, no idea of what was about to happen. Some extra sense of self-preservation seemed to direct his muscles to act, and he stamped the left rudder, sent the Spad lurching aside. He was vaguely aware of *Something* rushing past him. There was no slightest sound, nothing except the knowledge that some shadowy Presence something huge and evil, had passed him.

He swept the Spad in a swift circle, staring into the gloom. There was nothing to be seen, nothing to be heard. Yet a small voice whispered to Brand that the hand of death had struck at him, and narrowly missed! For a space of moments he dodged through the darkness, searching for he knew not what. Then landing flares blossomed on the dark field, and he shrugged, contemptuous of his twitching nerves. Then he eased the Spad in for the landing.

Abruptly, from a point some two miles from the drome, a blinding shaft of brilliance shot into the sky. The beam wavered, dipped, suddenly caught the Spad full in its radiance. Brand cursed, shielding his dazzled eyes with his arm. Those fools! Didn't they know better than to blind a landing pilot? Then the oaths died in his throat. A shuddering concussion rocked the Spad wildly. Simultaneously an orange blast of flame exploded a hundred yards away! A second and third detonation followed rapidly.

BRAND snarled in bewilderment. That anti-aircraft battery near the field;

they were firing at him! With suicidal speed he shot the Spad down toward the twin row of flares and fishtailed wildly, killing speed. Abruptly the firing cut off. The next moment the landing gear struck, bounced, came down again and held. As the single-seater coasted to a stop, Brand leaped to the ground. He was vaguely conscious of a group of men gathered about something out on the field, then he saw Kelsey moving toward him.

Brand seized the adjutant's arm, shook him roughly. "What's the idea?" he snapped angrily. "Why was that battery blazing away at me? Why the search-light stunt?"

Kelsey was babbling in his excitement. "Something—something was up there!" he cried. "Something fell on the field! I—I thought we were being bombed! I called the battery, told them to start firing!"

Brand's grip tightened. "You jittery fool! I ought to break your jaw! You damned near had me blown out of the air! Can't those idiots tell the sound of a Hisso yet? Come on, what was dropped? What's the excitement?"

Kelsey shot him a queer glance. "Right over here, Captain."

They joined the circle of men a hundred yards away. Brand disregarded the muttered exclamations of horror and shoved his way through the circle. He gazed down at the thing on the ground, then drew back involuntarily.

It lay there in ghastly silence, a pitiful little huddle of cloth and bones.

"God!" the word ripped unwittingly from Brand's suddenly dry throat.

The object on the ground was a skeleton, fleshless arms extended, bony skull grinning evilly. And the skeleton was grotesquely garbed in a major's uniform! Brand recognized the insignia, the silver wings. Major Bell had come home!

Brand stepped back, his eyes still glued

to that macabre thing on the ground. Abruptly he wheeled, seizing Kelsey's arm in an iron hand.

"Well, damn you, talk!" he blazed.

Kelsey began stuttering an explanation. "I don't know—it just happened! Hanley thought he heard something on the field just as you signalled for lights. We investigated, found this. Don't know how it got there—thought you must be a German. So I called the archie guys. God! The Old Man a skeleton! Four hours ago he was alive! What ghastly—"

"Have you notified H. Q.?" Brand demanded.

Kelsey gulped, nodded. "Colonel Harrigan said he'd be right down."

"Okay." Brand jerked his thumb at two pop-eyed ground guards. "You men bring—that—into the office. Kelsey, you and Hanley come along. Get busy, you guys! The Old Man won't bite you now!"

It was not until the uniformed skeleton had been deposited on the office floor that Brand noted the slip of paper pinned to the tunic. Curiously he detached it, held it to the light.

*"Warning to squadron commanders!
The same fate is waiting for the next!"*

That was all, just those twelve words of ominous warning. The note was unsigned. Brand whirled at the sound of screeching brakes outside the door, and a moment later a bulky form shoved arrogantly into the room.

Colonel Harrigan, the Wing Commander, was a gross figure of a man, with drooping jowls and close-set glittering eyes.

"What's this?" he blustered. "What's all this damn foolishness?"

"It's there on the floor, Colonel," Brand said evenly. "That's the foolishness!"

Harrigan's eyes dropped, and at sight of the object at his feet hastily recoiled a step. "Why, that's—that's Bell's uniform! What's been going on here?"

"You tell him, Kelsey," Brand said.

The adjutant explained what he knew of the happenings of the night. When he finished, Harrigan turned on Brand, his piggish eyes gleaming with suspicion.

"This looks queer to me, Captain Brand! You are away on a solitary flight when Major Bell receives a mysterious phone call. He takes off from the field, is never seen alive again. But you return, leave again, supposedly to search for him, then his skeleton appears on the field while you are circling overhead. Brand, did you kill Major Bell? Did you drop his body from your plane?"

"Don't be an utter fool, Colonel!" Brand jeered. All his dislikes for the pompous Wing officer leaped into full flame. This was not the first time he had clashed with Harrigan.

"Captain, let me remind you that I'm your superior!" Harrigan roared. "I could have you disciplined for that insolent remark! Kelsey, get me the commander of that anti-aircraft battery on the phone. I understand they've got an aircraft listening device there."

When the connection was made Harrigan asked a few swift questions, then hung up.

"Brand," he grated ominously, "that officer tells me that no other ship was near this field when the skeleton appeared! No plane was within miles—except your Spad! They're sure of that, because they had a man on duty on the electric ear! That puts it squarely up to you!"

Not until then did Brand recall the mysterious experience over the field. Remembering, he described it as well as he was able. The brass hat laughed scornfully.

"A likely yarn, that is! You didn't hear anything; you didn't actually see anything. Yet you are sure that there was something up there that narrowly missed you! Captain, I know well enough that

you've had trouble with Bell. You're hard, callous. You've got the reputation of being a killer! You're a law to yourself; can't stand discipline! All right—I say that in some way you lured Bell from the field, murdered him, then dropped his skeleton in a spirit of bravado!"

"Just how do you explain my reducing him to a skeleton?" Brand asked sarcastically. Despite his outward calm he sensed the cords of evidence tightening about him. Already Harrigan had enough to start a murder case.

"I don't know about that. You do enough lone wolf prowling to have devised some murderous scheme. I think my duty demands placing you under arrest, Captain Brand!"

"Just a minute," Brand's voice said coldly. "You say I'm a killer. All right, so is the thing or person that did this to Major Bell. Did you ever hear of the old adage, 'set a thief to catch a thief'? Why not make it, 'set a killer to catch a killer'?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just this," Brand retorted. "You give me two days to clear this thing up. You're not taking any chances; I can't get out of France. But if you arrest me you'll be making a big mistake; besides, you'll never know how Bell was killed!"

Harrigan stared at him for a long silent moment, then his heavy jaws clicked together. "All right, Captain. I'll just take you up on that proposition! I'll give you forty-eight hours in which to explain this thing. If you fail, I'll put you on trial for murder. And don't think you can get away with anything!"

Tex Brand slept little that night. He realized that he was in the toughest spot in a life which had contained many of them. The murder charge he feared not as much as for itself as for the past which the investigation would be sure to turn up. Brand had reason to dread a revival of the past. For Tex Brand was an

escaped convict, wanted for murder!

Three years before, he had been tried and sentenced to life imprisonment for a murder which he had not committed. Then had come the prison break, just before the entry of the United States into the war. Brand had managed an enlistment under an assumed name, had later joined the Air Service. The fact that he was living under constant threat of being recognized and returned to prison partially accounted for his dark moods. The burning resentment he held against society was now transformed into a reckless philosophy of fighting. He vented his rage on the Boche, and steadily his killer reputation had grown.

His thoughts ran back over that dark night of horror, the night of the prison break. He thought of Warden Walt Steele; of the brutal lifer, Bergwitz, who had engineered the break. Then he cast the past from his mind and concentrated on the problem before him. He smiled sardonically, thinking of his two days' grace. He hadn't the faintest idea what his first move would be.

CHAPTER TWO

Terror Rides the Skies

SHORTLY after dawn, as Brand was in the act of climbing into the pit of his Spad, a message came through from Wing H. Q. He listened, a tight grin quirking his thin lips.

"So I'm C. O. of the 77th, now!" he muttered grimly. The idea was ironical; under suspicion of murder, and promoted at the same time. He knew the command would be short lived unless he accomplished his mission. He ordered the notice of his promotion tacked to the order board, grunted as he saw the sullen expression of the pilots as they read it. Then he sent the Spad clawing its way into the gray dawn sky.

Not until his fuel supply was nearly

gone did Brand return to the drome. He had learned nothing, seen nothing. If anything unusual was taking place he had not been able to find trace of it. A switchboard orderly was impatiently waiting for him. As Brand swung down the man came running forward.

"Colonel Harrigan is on the phone," he called. "He's been calling ever since you took off!"

Brand nodded, hurried into the Operations Office. The Wing Commander's voice came over the wire with a breathless rush, holding a queer mixture of fury and terror.

"Five men gone!" Harrigan shouted. "The Commanders of the five squadrons in this sector have disappeared!"

"Is that all?" Brand asked quietly.

"All? My God, man, isn't that enough? But as it happens it isn't all! They disappeared between four o'clock last night and eight this morning. Moreover, four of them have been found; that is, their skeletons! Yes, dressed in uniform, like Bell was!"

Brand felt the cold chill of death crawl down his spine. Something ghastly, some hellish fate— Then Harrigan was going on, his bull voice queerly shaken.

"Brand, I'm relieving you of command, placing you under arrest! Your Spad was seen flying near Major Reynolds' ship, of the 53rd, this morning! And Reynolds hasn't been seen since!"

Panic raced through Brand's brain. Yet he forced his voice to an icy calmness.

"Harrigan, you're a fool if you do that! Listen, suppose I am mixed up in this thing. I must have accomplices, isn't that right? If I'm arrested I swear you'll never get a word out of me that'll help you! You know me, Harrigan; you know I can't be forced to talk if I don't want to! Another thing, you're going to find it tough getting men to replace those C. O.'s! Leave me in command—give me the time you promised!"

"All right, but God help you if you cross me, Brand!"

Brand slammed up the receiver and left the office. A ship had landed while he had been inside, a brand new Spad. The pilot came toward Brand.

"Name is Shelley," he said, saluting. "Replacement, reporting for duty with the 77th, Captain."

Brand shot the newcomer a sharp glance, noted the mature brown face, the keen gray eyes. His mouth jerked in grim humor. Replacement! G-2 was written all over the new man! So Harrigan intended to have him shadowed!

"Are you leaving again, Captain?" Shelley inquired curiously.

Brand shook his head. "Go on in the office; I'll be back in a moment."

As Shelley obeyed, Brand hurried to the hangars. He found Kelsey, drew the flight leader aside. "You're in charge of regular patrols until further orders," he said swiftly. "See that the routine work is kept up."

Then he slammed into his Spad's pit and shot the little scout into the air. He grinned mirthlessly as he saw Shelley come running upon the field and head toward his own ship. But before the G-2 man could get into the air, Brand was gone into the misty gray sky. Once certain that Shelley was not following, he gunned swiftly toward the 53rd.

A half hour later he dropped down through the low ceiling and landed. The 53rd was a British outfit, and as two officers came forward Brand saw the suspicion that flamed into their eyes as they recognized him.

"I think an explanation is due, Captain," a lean lieutenant drawled. Behind his casual British calm Brand sensed mounting terror and panic. "What became of Major Reynolds after he left you? Your ship was seen flying with him, you know!"

"Not mine," Brand denied. He

glanced at the number on the Spad's fuselage. It was the same that he had worn on his gray prison suit. "Has anything been heard of your S. C. since he disappeared?"

"Nothing. I—Good God!"

At the sheer horror in the Lieutenant's voice, Brand whirled. The Limey's face was putty gray, his shaking arm pointed to an object on the ground. Brand found himself staring at a grotesque huddle of bones and cloth. A skeleton; and wearing the swanky uniform of an R. F. C. major!

"Reynolds!" The lieutenant gasped. "God! His uniform—how—"

Brand stared at the sky, heard nothing, saw nothing. He snatched a folded note from the skeleton, saw that it was identical with the one found on Major Bell.

"That—that wasn't here five seconds ago!" the Englishman jerked. His eyes flamed with suspicion and rage. He swung on Brand, shouting an order. Brand stepped close, shot his fist in a short, hard uppercut. The R. F. C. officer staggered back and Brand leaped into the Spad's pit.

As the ship shot down the field his brain was racing furiously. "These outfits are jittery as hell already! And wait until they try to pass these commanders' jobs on!"

As the Spad ripped steadily skyward, Brand's eyes searched the gray murk ex-

pectantly. But there was nothing to be seen. He throttled down and listened again. Faintly, he picked up the beat of a motor. He kicked rudder, and gradually the roar increased in volume. A Mercedes! Yet he was positive that there had been no ship near the 53rd's drome when Reynolds' body had been discovered!

Brand came scudding from a bank of low-hanging clouds and instantly picked up a set of knife-edged wings just sliding into another billow of mist. He crammed full throttle to the Hisso, tore in pursuit.

He became aware that the Pfalz was leading him deeper and deeper, into the mountain region between the lines, but thrust the thought aside. Steadily, slowly, he drew up on the fleeing Hun ship. He pressed the trips and a warning burst ripped from the Vickers.

Then, so abruptly that for a second Brand was caught by surprise, the Pfalz whirled. As the black-crossed ship came hurtling at him with both Spandaus flaming, Brand shoved the Spad into a sharp dive. Swiftly he hauled back on the stick, sent a sizzling drag of hot lead stabbing up at the Pfalz. The Hun ship side-slipped instantly out of range.

Suddenly, slugs pattered like hail on the Spad's quivering wings, snapped and whined past Brand's head. And they came from behind! He threw the Spad into a snap-roll, acting mechanically as



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his eyes swerved over his shoulder. A second Pfalz was there, riding his tail with guns chattering vengefully! And the truth burst upon Brand. He had been decoyed here—tricked into a death trap!

The second Pfalz dodged past and banked steeply. Both Boche planes came charging in at him, one from each side. Brand shot up in a twisting chandelle, and again and again his guns roared, swerving from one Hun to the other. The one he had first seen thrust up its nose sharply, and the tracer slashed a dizzy trail across the cloudy sky. Under the impact of the burst the Spad leaped and rocked like a runaway horse. Brand went over on one wing, tumbling the scout down like a fluttering leaf. Maltese crosses glistened briefly in his sights and he pressed the trips down. The Pfalz seemed to stagger, recover, then go lunging out of danger. At the same moment the second Hun closed in. A short, savage drag missed Brand's body by inches.

His glance went to his ammo belts, and his heart leaped into his mouth. The belts were three-quarters run through the guns! He recalled now that in his haste to escape Shelley he had neglected to check them before taking off. He flung a desperate glance about him. Only desolate mountain country and empty sky rewarded his gaze. Here, high in the mountains, he was out of the path of any regular patrols. The realization came to him then that he was doomed, soon to go down an easy prey to these two swooping Huns. For a split-second he thought he glimpsed a tiny dot to the east, then he had no more chance to do anything but try to sell his life as dearly as possible.

Brand shot the Spad through impossible maneuvers as he dodged the insistent Germans. His fingers did not touch the trips until he felt sure of the target. But the Pfalz pilots had no intention of sav-

ing ammunition. The Spad became the vortex of a swirling, creeping trail of gray tracer smoke.

Closer and closer the gusts of lead came to the cockpit. The wings of the Spad began to resemble a sieve. Then, as though guessing his lack of ammo, the Pfalzes grew bolder. They pressed him back and down, until the end loomed very close and terrible to Tex Brand. He shot up in an Immelman, bluffed the Pfalz which tried to block him out of his course. As he swept past, he saw an expression of incredulity flash over the German pilot's dark face. The man had turned, was glaring behind him. And tracers were pounding down on the Pfalz' tail!

Abruptly, Brand half-rolled and dove. His Vickers stammered briefly and the tracer trail led straight to the Hun's pit. The Pfalz staggered, went dipping down, and Brand, with this brief respite, shot a look behind him. The sight jerked him stiff in his seat.

TEARING in at the second Hun was a fourth ship, one which bore Allied co-cards on its wings! Not a modern Spad or Nieuport or Camel, but an ancient R.E. 8! Brand glimpsed the figure of the pilot perched in the flimsy fuselage as the old plane wobbled after the remaining Pfalz. He saw the delighted grin on the newcomer's face, then Brand was throwing his own Spad in wild pursuit.

This ancient bus had provided the diversion that had saved him, but he knew that the R.E. could not match the swifter Pfalz. But if that thought had also occurred to the R.E.'s pilot he was paying no attention to it. The old crate lunged gallantly straight at the German. As the Pfalz came about with both guns flaming, Brand dove and let a half dozen slugs rip through his Vickers.

The Pfalz jerked as if stung, then wavered and headed down in a long, flat glide.

Brand noted the grassy meadow toward which the Pfalz was heading, dropped in swift pursuit. The old killer instinct urged him to blast the landing Hun with both guns, but a new thought made him hesitate. If he could take the man alive, it might be possible to force some clue from him. Somehow, Brand felt a hunch that this attack on him had some connection with the havoc that had struck the sector.

Though his attention was fixed on the Pfalz, Brand was aware that the R.E. was also gliding down. Then the Pfalz came in close to the ground, wings dipping wildly. For a second they steadied, just as the wheels struck. The ship had barely ceased rolling when Brand's Spad hit the meadow.

Brand was jerking at his Colt, ready to jump to the ground even before the Spad slowed. He saw the German drag himself to the wing and drop unsteadily to the earth. He ran two faltering steps, then, even as Brand shouted a command and lifted his own weapon, the Hun collapsed. Brand ran forward, bent down. He straightened with a frown. There would be no information here; the man was dead. Apparently he had managed to hold consciousness just long enough to land, before his life seeped away through the gaping wound in his head.

A half mile away a lazy column of smoke marked the smouldering ruin of the other Pfalz. Then Brand saw the R.E. coasting ahead, saw the pilot leap down and come running forward. The next moment both men were staring face to face.

The .45 in Brand's hand jerked forward. Simultaneously the stranger's own weapon centered on Brand's heart.

"You—Steele!" The words croaked from Brand's taut lips.

"Right," clipped the pilot of the R.E. "Warden and life-convict meet again! One move, Rogers, and I'll—"

Brand laughed harshly. "Don't be a fool, Steele. You can't kill me before I kill you! And besides, the name is *Brand*, now. Not Rogers. You might as well get used to it."

The other nodded slowly. "This looks like check-mate, *Brand*. But this time you don't give me the slip. You've cost me plenty; this is the showdown!"

Steele, warden of the prison from which Brand had made his escape, smiled grimly. He had a square, hard face, and a mouth that suggested a steel trap. Gray eyes with the glint of tempered metal squinted from slitted lids. His hair, black except for a tinge of gray around the temples, straggled from beneath his helmet.

"I ought to kill you where you stand!" Brand jerked. "You're the only one who knows where I—"

Steele grunted. "That's what I'd expect from you, *Brand*! Killers run true to form! But since neither of us can shoot without committing suicide, we can't stand here all day like two fools. Put away your gun, and I'll do the same—for the present. I don't mind telling you that I haven't been on your trail."

Slowly Brand relaxed. He holstered the Colt. "All right. I've never figured you for a liar, Steele."

For a moment both men were silent, their minds running back over the dark events of the past. Then Brand spoke slowly. "I suppose your first move will be to turn me in?"

"Why shouldn't I?" Steele flamed bitterly. "You engineered that prison break! That cost me my job! I'd spent years gaining that position; you wiped it all away in one night's hellish work!"

"You lie!" Brand's huge body was tense, his voice vibrant. "I didn't figure that break; I didn't know anything about it until it happened! I saw my chance to escape, and took it, just as anyone else would have. God, man, how'd you like to

be shut up for the rest of your life for a crime you didn't commit?"

"They all say that," Steele jeered. "If you didn't plan the break, who did?"

"Bergwitz," Brand retorted. "Anton Bergwitz! That's the reason I joined the 77th six months ago; I heard that there was a Boche in the sector by the same name. It can't be the one, yet I had to make sure. I haven't found out yet. But here's another thing, believe it or not. You remember how Bergwitz hated the Principal Keeper? Well, the night of the break I kept him from murdering the P.K."

"Bergwitz was a killer, and the type who might have pulled that job," Steele said thoughtfully. "But I don't see why I should take your word. And don't forget that I saved your life, just a few minutes ago!"

That brought Brand's thoughts back to the present. "And I saved yours, at the same time," he retorted. His eyes narrowed thoughtfully as he glanced at the ancient R.E. Those crates hadn't been used since '16.

"Mind telling me what outfit you're with?" he asked. "This looks funny to me, Steele. You're too old to be accepted for flying service. And that old crate there—what're you up to, anyway?"

A dull red wave crept over Steele's face. He started to speak, then hesitated. Finally: "There's no use lying to you, Brand. You could find out later. The fact is, I've been a flyer for years. But when I tried to enlist, they turned me down on account of my age. But I *had* to get in the Service! So I dyed my hair, tried again. I was accepted, passed my training okay, and was ready for assignment to active duty when some officious fool discovered I'd lied about my age.

"They tossed me out, then. But I'd made up my mind to get a crack at the Huns if it was the last thing I ever did. I had a chance to grab this old bus they

were using as a training plane. I knew enough about gunnery to mount the Vickers myself. So I grabbed the R.E., and headed toward the Front. That's when I met you. That's something you couldn't understand, Brand—why a man would do a thing like that in order to serve his country. The only reason you're in the army is because it made a convenient place for you to hide!"

Despite the jibe, a grudging admiration gleamed momentarily in Brand's deep-set eyes.

"So you're a thief! You stole a plane and you're A.W.O.L. Do you know the penalty for stealing Government property? Yet *you* yap about turning *me* in!"

"When I'm ready I'll turn you in, and take the consequences," Steele grated.

Brand glanced down at the dead body of the German which lay unheeded between them. Suddenly he leaned forward tensely. "Steele, how'd you like a chance to really do something for Uncle Sam?"

In staccato sentences he explained the situation. "And if I give you a hand, what do you want out of it?" Steele asked suspiciously.

"I'll smuggle you onto the roster of my outfit," Brand replied. "I'll give you at least a few days' action. And you'll keep your mouth shut about me until it's all over!"

Steele came to a swift decision. "Okay, I'll take you up. But remember, as soon as this thing is cleared up, you're going back to the States! And get this straight, Brand. As far as I'm concerned you're an escaped murderer! I don't trust you out of my sight! You've got the reputation of a killer, and at the first sign of a double cross you're done for!"

"That goes double for me. To me you're a damned prison screw, and I hate your guts! But forget that stuff now. Five squadron commanders have been murdered, reduced to skeletons. Every outfit in this sector is jittery as hell, and

they'll have a sweet time getting anyone to take those guys' places. Moreover, I've a hunch that this is just the first move of something a damned sight worse. The Huns have worked out some devilish scheme. We're going to stop 'em Steele! Yeah, lifer and prison screw!"

Brand bent over the dead Hun, running his hands swiftly through his clothing. A moment later he straightened with a thin piece of paper in his hand.

CHAPTER THREE

Masquerade Hun

CURIOSLY Brand opened the paper, ran his eyes over the German words. The message was brief, apparently a sort of passport. It said: "This will introduce the bearer as one of my pilots. He will fly you to the rendezvous." Signed: B.

It was not the content of the message, or the signature which excited Brand. Rather, it was the person to whom the message was addressed, none other than General Otto von Gershin.

Steele peered at this paper. "Who's this von Gershin, anyway?"

"He's in charge of the army corps across the lines!" Brand's voice held excitement. "It's evident that this pilot was to fly von Gershin to an appointment. If a ranking general like von Gershin is involved, it must be something big! It may even have some connection with the job

you and I are talking about!"

"So what?" Steele grumbled. "We don't know anything about it, haven't any way of finding out."

"No?" Brand snapped. "I'm gonna take this bird's place!"

"You mean, fly this General to—you're crazy? They'd know you weren't the right man! Anyway, you don't know where to find the General, or this B guy, either."

"If the pilot was known to Gershin there wouldn't have been any point in sending this note. As for finding him—"

Brand stepped to the Pfalz and peered into the pit. A sector map was clipped to the instrument board, and on it two points were pencil-marked. One of them, well behind the German lines, must be the location of the Headquarters field. The other indicated a spot in the mountains within ten miles of where they stood.

A swift inspection of the Pfalz showed it to be undamaged. In five minutes Brand had the Mercedes idling and was changing uniforms with the dead pilot.

"You take off in about an hour," he instructed. "Then cruise around a few miles north of here. If you see a Boche ship, it'll probably be me. Don't come too close, but stand by in case I need you. Can you fly a Spad?"

Steele nodded.

"Then use my ship. Get this Hun's body and that R.E. out of sight. And remember, you're probably being hunted, so watch your step."

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Steele squinted suspiciously. "How do I know you aren't taking a runout on me?"

"You don't," Brand grunted. "You're just gonna take my word for it!"

He smeared his face plentifully with motor grease. Then for a moment he sat in the pit, a huge, grim figure. The chances he was about to take loomed in their true light. Then he laughed mirthlessly. What had he to lose? Death at the hands of the Huns would be preferable to spending the remainder of his life in a rotten prison. He shoved one full throttle, shot the Pfalz into the afternoon sky with a zooming rush.

As he thundered toward the German lines, he wondered if that air duel over the mountains had been sighted. If so, his exposure as an impostor would undoubtedly come swiftly. Then he shrugged all thoughts of failure aside and concentrated on watching the surrounding sky. Twice he swerved aside to avoid Allied patrols, and once a Fokker flight passed scant rods away.

Brand held a bee-line course straight toward the spot marked on the map. As he came nearer he watched the ground and presently made out a smooth field lined with hangars and smaller buildings. A mile away the church spire and peaked roofs of a small town reared their heads. Satisfied that this was the designated field, Brand boldly slanted in for a landing. He was grateful now for his ability to speak fluent German. In a moment he would stake his life on that ability.

As the plane wheeled to a stop a ground officer advanced casually. Brand swung down, saluted. "The General von Gershin, I believe he is expecting me?"

The officer shrugged. "Perhaps. Come this way; we shall see."

He led the way across the field to a sheet-iron office. Inside the door he asked a question of a soldier at a desk, then suddenly straightened to rigid attention

as a spare, iron faced man stepped from an inner office.

"*Herr Excellency*, here is a pilot who says you are expecting him."

Von Gershin ran gimlet eyes over Brand's greasy face. "Ja? You have something for me, perhaps?"

Brand drew the message of introduction from his pocket, passed it to the Prussian. The General glanced through it, flashed Brand another keen glance, then led the way outside.

"I suppose I should place you under arrest immediately," he said gruffly. "Just as I would like to do with your mutinous commander!"

Then, as Brand's heart leaped furiously, he continued: "But first I will speak with him, as he requests. You will leave your single-seater here, and take that Hanover which is being serviced."

A mechanic sergeant came forward, reported the Hanover ready for flight. Von Gershin clambered into the rear pit as Brand settled himself behind the controls. He delayed, faking listening to the motor, while he ran his eyes over the unfamiliar instrument board. It was the first time he had ever attempted flying a Boche two-seater. Once satisfied that the controls were arranged similar to the ships he knew, he cracked full throttle.

As the two-seater lumbered forward, Brand delicately felt out the controls. The next moment he was lifting the Hanover into the air. The ship handled easily, almost as well as a pursuit job. Instantly he set a course toward the mountain rendezvous indicated on the map he had brought with him.

Mile after mile droned away under the broad wings of the Hanover. Once, as they penetrated deeper into the mountains, Brand thought he glimpsed a ship following far behind. He wondered if it was Steele in the Spad. The next moment von Gershin's voice came through the phones.

"Where are you taking me? At the first sign of treachery I shall—"

Brand turned, staring without expression into the Mauser pistol that von Gershin had leveled. "I am only following my orders, *Herr General*," he said emotionlessly.

Von Gershin subsided with a grunt. Another thought was nagging at Brand's mind. That Spad bearing his numerals that had been seen with Reynolds—evidently the Huns had a captured Spad. But why did it bear his serial number? Sheer coincidence was hard to believe.

LOOKING down, Brand found himself flying over a region of bare rock crags and small mountain valleys. A glance at the map indicated that they must be nearly over the designated landing place. A few points off his left wing a sizable expanse of grassy meadow appeared, and at its extreme end was a small hut, evidently a deserted mountaineer's shack. Watching, Brand saw a figure appear, wave an arm in a signal. Immediately he nosed the Hanover down, circled twice, then landed smoothly.

Now came the real test, he thought. This man, probably the writer of the note, would surely know Brand as an imposter. Brand swerved to a stop some distance from the hut, ruddering the ship about in position for a hasty takeoff. Then he hunched as low as possible in the pit to conceal his huge frame. He realized that a grimy faced man wearing a helmet looks much like any other. If only he was not ordered to leave the plane!

The man who had signalled approached to within a few yards of the ship, but the growing darkness prevented Brand's securing a clear look at his face.

"This way, please, General," the man said in a grating voice. "You, Lieber, remain with the ship."

Von Gershin grumbled, but clambered heavily to the ground. In a moment both

men had disappeared inside the hut. Brand hesitated. There was some familiar quality about the stranger's voice that he couldn't place. He glanced at the hut where a light now gleamed through the cracks in the wall. If the hut boasted a window, it was on the far side. Sure that he wouldn't be seen, Brand dropped to the ground and edged quickly toward the shack. The Hanover's motor he left clicking over. In a few moments he was flattened against the flimsy wall, trying to peer through the cracks.

A lamp guttered upon a makeshift table inside the hut's single room, and von Gershin and his mysterious host faced each other across the rough boards. The stranger shifted then, and Brand's pulse suddenly leaped madly. No stranger, this, but Anton Bergwitz, erstwhile lifer in San Quentin penitentiary! Bergwitz was the mysterious 'B'!

Brand disregarded the questions hammering at his brain, glued every sense on what was being said inside.

"Bergwitz," von Gershin was growling, "you're a mutinous deserter. If I did my duty I'd arrest you this moment!"

Bergwitz laughed harshly. "Don't forget, *Herr General*, that you're hardly in a position to do any arresting! You're entirely in my hands, at my mercy. And don't flatter yourself that you've located my headquarters; this is merely a spot I chose for this meeting, so that you *wouldn't* learn my location!"

With those words, memory of something Brand had heard weeks before flashed through his brain. Von Gershin had called Bergwitz a deserter, and the ex-convict had referred to a drome elsewhere. The story Brand had heard was that a squadron of German pilots had mutinied against their commander, had chosen one of their own members as leader, and had moved planes and equipment to a secret base which had never been found. Von Gershin's remark seemed

to indicate that Bergwitz himself might be the leader of that hidden staffel! But if so, what possible connection could the General have with Bergwitz? Brand bent again to listen.

"Did you bring the money?" Bergwitz was demanding. "I've kept my part of the bargain; the Allied *schwein* have disappeared, have they not?"

Von Gershin nodded. "*Ja*, already our agents have heard the story of the skeletons in uniform. That was a good touch! *Himmel*, I hear the dogs are already losing morale!"

"I'm waiting for the money," Bergwitz reminded avidly.

The General drew forth a huge roll of bills from his pocket, passed them silently to Bergwitz. The outlaw staffel leader counted them hurriedly.

"*Ach*, this is correct! Now, *mein* General, what would the High Command pay if I managed to—"

Here he dropped his voice, so that Brand, strain his ears though he might, could not make out the words. But they apparently carried plenty of significance to von Gershin, for the General half leaped to his feet, eyes popping.

"Pay? A hundred thousand marks! More—possibly! But *Mein Gott*, that you cannot do! It has been tried before! The place is protected by five pursuit squadrons!"

"Anton Bergwitz can do it," was the insolent reply. "Remember, that is a bargain!"

So intent on the conversation in the hut was Brand that he failed to hear the faint sounds made by the landing Spad. Hisso dead, the landing ship was almost completely silent. Nor did he see or hear Walt Steele as the ex-warden approached the shack's sagging door. A gruff order came in Bergwitz' voice: "Lieber! Come in here!"

Brand waited a reasonable length of time, then stepped through the door, heart

pumping wildly. Bergwitz did not even glance up as he jammed the bank notes into his pocket.

"Lieber, see that General von Gershin safely reaches his headquarters. Then report back to the base."

Brand muttered a "Ja," conscious that in the shadowy light Bergwitz hadn't penetrated his identity. But at any moment—

Even as the thought struck through Brand's mind, there came a sudden interruption. A man's bulky figure filled the doorway, and Steele's voice rasped: "*Handen hoch*, you guys!"

Both Germans cursed, made a tentative grab for their guns. Sight of Steele, crouched watchfully in the doorway over a leveled Colt, changed their minds. Slowly their hands lifted.

Bergwitz stared hard at Steele's face, then cursed savagely, a bewildered light on his face. "Steele! You damned prison screw!"

"Big Anton!" Steele jeered. "How'd you like to go back to San Quentin, Bergwitz?"

Bergwitz, a giant nearly as huge as Brand, had a disproportionately small head set with blue, killer's eyes. The entire expression of his face was crafty cunning backed by evil cruelty. He said nothing, glaring at Steele with the watchful ferocity of a trapped wolf. Then fate took a sudden hand in the game.

The rickety door, caught in an abrupt gust of wind, banged suddenly in upon Steele, sending him staggering forward. His gun arm was jolted so sharply that he nearly dropped the Colt. Simultaneously, von Gershin flung his lanky body forward gamely, his hand stabbing for Steele's wrist.

"Grab his gun, Lieber!" Bergwitz belted. Then, as Brand darted forward, Bergwitz uttered a strangled yowl. "Mein Gott! You—Brand!"

At the same second Brand closed with

him, locking Bergwitz' gun hand with his left, his other hand smashing at the big German's face.

CHAPTER FOUR

Death to Traitors

UNDER the first savage blow Brand felt bone and teeth crumble like wax, and blood coursed down Bergwitz' face. With a shriek of animal fury, he abandoned his effort to draw his gun and swung heavily at Brand's jaw. In that moment Brand forgot his gun, forgot the struggle between von Gershin and Steele. At last he was at grips with Bergwitz, and a berserk rage took possession of him! He smashed the German against the wall with a force that threatened to bring the shack down on their heads. As Bergwitz staggered forward again, Brand met him willingly. For a moment both men traded blow for blow. Abruptly Brand brought his right up to the Hun's jaw. The impact sounded like a maul striking a side of beef.

Bergwitz' eyes glazed, he leaned against the corner of the room, half conscious. Bruised and battered, Brand regained a measure of sanity. He snatched Bergwitz' gun from his belt, then whirled just as Steele sent von Gershin reeling. Steele's gun leveled once more, swung on Brand. For the first time he recognized him.

"Who told you to come barging in here?" Brand growled angrily.

Steele shrugged. "I'm not taking orders from you, Brand. When I saw you land I decided to have a look myself. Look, Bergwitz is coming around!"

The huge German wiped the blood from his face grogily. In the glow of the lantern, which had miraculously remained unbroken, his features were demoniac. The General, also recovered, glared watchfully.

"Was it you or Brand who engineered that break at San Quentin?" Steele asked harshly.

Bergwitz sneered evilly. "Brand? He wouldn't have the brains or guts for a things like that! *I* worked that break! And I picked a time when there was a German ship in the harbor. I got out to it; they were glad to enlist me and ask no questions!"

"Score one for you, Brand," Steele said evenly. "Now what are we gonna do with these two Huns?"

Before Brand could answer, Bergwitz spoke furiously. "The best thing you can do is let us loose. Steele, I haven't forgotten the week in solitary you gave me! I'll square that with you some day. And Brand, if it hadn't been for you I'd of cut that rotten Principal Keeper's heart out! God help both of you if I ever get hold of you!"

In his hate-filled threats was such horribly evil promise that even Brand's hard face tightened. He remembered the five grinning skeletons and a shudder coursed down his spine. Bergwitz exuded an aura of sickening evil.

There came an abrupt crash behind Brand. He whirled, and even as he realized that the sound was only the banging of the swinging door, Bergwitz acted. One sweep of his huge arm swept the lantern full at Brand's face. Simultaneously the German threw his weight against the weakened side of the shack. His great bulk slammed the thin boards aside like paper. His yell boomed at von Gershin: "Come on!"

The thing happened in the flicker of an eyelash. As the Yanks swung around, guns flaming, only the gaping hole in the wall confronted them. Brand yelled, a cry of pure rage. In the sudden darkness he crashed into the wall as he dove toward the door. Then Steele collided with him and both men fell to the floor, cursing savagely.

Brand was the first to regain his feet. He lunged into the open, and the Colt in his hand roared vengefully at the dark

blot of the Hanover. A mocking, evil laugh floated back. As Steele appeared beside him, Brand lurched toward the two-seater. Instantly he knew that they were too late. The motor thundered into full cry and the broad wings swept into motion. By the time Brand reached the spot, the Hanover was a diminishing blur down the dark field.

"The Spad!" Steele yelled frantically. "We'll get—"

"Not a chance!" Brand clutched at Steele's shoulder. "Down, you fool! They're zooming the field!"

A dark shape came roaring down over them, and Spandaus jabbered viciously. Dust and grass spurted around the huddled Yanks. But the gloom saved them, and a moment later the drone of the Hanover slowly faded away.

"Not a ghost of a chance to start the Spad and catch 'em," Brand grated. "Hell! We let 'em slip right through our fingers!"

"Well, it seems you told the truth about the break, and about saving the P.K.," Steele said suddenly.

"Forget that stuff!" Brand jerked roughly. "I don't give a damn what you think! Listen, I heard enough before you barged in to know that this business of the skeletons is just a start! Bergwitz pulled those murders for a purpose; there's something bigger coming, something that'll make those murders look insignificant. God, I wish I could have heard what it was! At that, I'll bet Bergwitz is wondering right now how much I *did* hear!"

"Well, what's next?" Steele demanded impatiently. "How long are we gonna hang around here?"

"Haven't had enough yet, eh?" Brand laughed grimly. "Well, back to the 77th I guess. One thing's sure; Bergwitz' been framing me by using that Spad in his dirty work! Which reminds me, I'd better not go back wearing a Hun uniform!"

Steele shrugged. "Let's go. I haven't had any grub since yesterday. I put your uniform beside the German's body in those bushes at the end of the field."

Twenty minutes later, with Steele clinging precariously to one wing, Brand lifted the Spad from the meadow and headed toward the drome of the 77th. Flashing thought stormed through his mind. He knew that von Gershin had spoken the truth when he had said the morale of the Allied squadrons in that sector had suffered a heavy blow. With a mysterious death stalking their commanders, hard-bitten pilots that had never paled in the face of the Boche could not help but feel the pressure. Many of them would be convinced that the famous Tex Brand had turned against them, that he was implicated in the terrors. Brand could understand, too, the uproar that was being made over the murdered officers. Bell was the son of one of the richest men in the United States, a scion of an old and important family.

For that matter, the British major, Reynolds, had a brother in the House of Lords. A sudden stunning thought struck Brand. Reynolds—Bell—Mather! Why all of them came from high places! Mather's father was a cabinet member. Every one of the five was either rich in his own right or the heir of a wealthy, influential family! He wondered suddenly if that fact had any connection with their murders.

Obeying a swift impulse, Brand swung away from the lines, headed toward the Yank back areas. He'd land at H.Q., put the information he had before Colonel Harrigan. If the old fool still thought him guilty—

The Spad swept over Fourchette, followed the silvery glimmer of a stream to the west. Wing H.Q. field lay only a mile or two ahead.

Suddenly, Brand stiffened in the cockpit, staring ahead. A muffled yell came

from Steele. Brand throttled down until the Hisso's roar faded to a faint whisper. Again he felt it, a faint booming concussion. At the same moment, a scarlet blob of flame blossomed on the dark earth below. Then another, and another, followed by the distant explosions.

"What the hell!" Brand roared. "H.Q. is being shelled or bombed!"

He jammed the throttle full on and sent the Spad hurtling forward. Nearer now, flame belched from a dozen points on the huge field below. The light of burning buildings exposed a scene of incredible confusion. In the glare, ant-like figures were scurrying in all directions.

From a half dozen different points searchlights stabbed their brilliant shafts of radiance into the sky. One of them crossed the wings of the Spad, swung frantically back. For a moment the scout hung suspended in the silver glow like a butterfly impaled on a wall. A coughing explosion pulsed a few rods away and orange flame blinded Brand as he zizzagged desperately in an effort to throw the searchlight off its mark. More and more of the shattering explosions, then in the glare on the earth below he saw tiny winged shapes scudding along, lifting skyward.

"THAT'S the second time they've fired on me!" The savage growl in his voice spelled trouble for someone as he yanked the Spad out of the tell-tale light and thundered toward the 77th. For a moment he had forgotten Steele, now he chuckled grimly as he sensed how desperately the ex-warden must have been gripping struts and wires.

Disdaining to signal for lights, he slammed down on the 77th's broad field and halted the Spad well away from the hangars.

"Get off here and keep out of sight until I pave the way," he ordered harshly. "I've got a hunch that hell's gonna be

popping around here before long!"

Steele slid from the wing and disappeared in the darkness. Brand taxied forward to the line and swung the Spad about.

"Gas and oil," he told the mech who came to meet him. "And see that those ammo belts are replaced."

He strode to the Operations Office, disregarding the curious stares of the pilots he met. Near the door Kelsey stepped out of the darkness.

"I don't like this business," the flight leader said gruffly. "Are you putting me in charge just so I'll get what Bell got—while you sneak off out of the way?"

Kelsey sighted then the bleak glare in Brand's eyes. He mumbled something under his breath, then drew away. Brand stepped on into his private office—and a man rose from the desk, where he had been evidently searching through the squadron records. It was the new man, Shelley.

"Been away quite awhile, haven't you, Captain?" he asked carelessly.

Brand lunged forward, one big hand darting out. He grasped the slender Shelley by the shirt front, lifted him squirming into the air. Brand's voice was the ominous rumble of a grizzly as he shook the man viciously.

"Listen, you! I know you're a G-2 snoop, but that doesn't make a damned bit of difference to me! I'm still commander here, and by all that's holy, I'll have no one prowling through my personal belongings! Now get out and stay out!"

He gave the snarling Intelligence officer a shove through the door, then lowered his big bulk into the chair. For a half hour he sat quietly, trying to fit the different parts of the puzzle together. At the end of that time the shrill screech of automobile brakes outside drew him to his feet. Boots trampled in the outer office, then the door banked abruptly open. Col-

onel Harrigan stamped in, two subordinate officers at his heels. A bloody cloth decorated the Wing Commander's forehead.

Before Harrigan could speak, Brand stepped forward. He shook one massive fist under the Colonel's nose. "Harrigan," he thundered, "tonight's the second time I've been fired on by Yankarchie. I know well enough that this time it was by your orders! If it happens again, Colonel or no Colonel, I'm gonna punch that thick head of yours off your shoulders!"

A fury that held him momentarily speechless turned Harrigan's face purple. When he regained his voice he leveled a shaking finger at Brand.

"Brand, you're under arrest! These men will witness the language you used to a superior! But it isn't that that I'm arresting you for. It's for murder and treason!"

"I've heard all that before," Brand grunted.

"Yes? You listen to me! I was a fool to give you the rope I did. But you've hung yourself with it now. That bombing of Wing H.Q. was the last straw!"

"You think I had something to do with that?"

"Think! I know! I myself was nearly killed by one of the explosions! Your Hispano was the only motor heard overhead! You're in too deep to talk your way out now, Brand. You'll face a firing squad for tonight's work!"

"You think a Spad could have carried a couple of dozen heavy bombs?" Brand grated. "Listen, you fool!"

He told all that he had learned that day, omitting any mention of Walt Steele. And when he finished Harrigan laughed at him.

"I'm past the point where your fairy stories can take me in," the Colonel snarled. He turned to one of his companions. "Call the adjutant and a detail of armed men in here!"

Ten minutes later Brand was shoved into a sturdy guard room, with two sentries armed with Springfields outside the door. The realization that he was once more behind iron bars aroused in Tex Brand a sort of killing fury. For an hour he paced the cramped room, unable to think. Gradually, by an iron effort of will he forced his racing brain to reason.

How could the H.Q. field have been bombed? He had listened several times up there, and there had been no roar of motors. He knew that Harrigan's theory was that he, Brand, had been signalling in some way to long range Boche batteries, giving them the mark. But artillery seemed out of the question. He remembered the *Thing* he had encountered on the preceding night. He thought of the five macabre skeletons. There was no question in his mind that Anton Bergwitz was behind everything that had happened. The fiendishly clever details bore all the earmarks of the Hun killer's deceased brain.

A glance at his watch showed him that only a few hours remained before dawn. Outside, the field was deathly quiet. Thunder rumbled faintly overhead, forming a dull overtone to the monotonous growl of the heavy guns. Brand's fingers clenched until the nails started the blood. Jailed! A trial was certain to start him on the long trail back to San Quentin! Then a sudden slight sound drew his attention to the only tiny, barred window.

Brand crossed to the window in three strides, and for a moment the scratching sound was not repeated. Then it came again, and at the same moment a pale face confronted him on the other side of the bars.

"Steele!" Brand whispered harshly.

"So they've finally got you back behind bars, where you belong!" Steele jeered softly.

"I was prowling around the field and overheard enough talk to tell me what

had happened. I'm a fool, Brand. I'm going against everything I ever stood for, now—putting my neck in a noose. Yeah, I'm a fool, but I'm gonna get you outa there! This business is one thing you're not guilty of, anyway!"

"Stop talking then, and get busy!"

"Right!" Steele leaned closer. "I don't know if those soldiers have got the keys or not, but I'm gambling. When I take care of 'em, you be ready to make a break."

Brand flexed his huge arms. "Never mind the keys," he growled. "You take care of those guards and I'll do the rest."

Steele dropped from sight and Brand crossed to the door, crouched there, every muscle tense. A sharp gust of rain beat against the building. Through the small grill in the door he could see the two doughboys crouched miserably together against the scant shelter of the door. Watching, Brand saw a figure leap suddenly before them. The faint light glittered dully on the gun in Steele's hand.

"Stick 'em up, you guys!"

The sentries had no chance to bring their rifles into play. After a moment's hesitation the Springfields slithered from their hands and their arms lifted. Another curt order from Steele and both men sprawled on the ground. His voice lifted cautiously: "All right, big boy!"

Brand threw his great body against the door with an impact not to be denied. Screws and nails split from their sockets; the barrier crashed open. To Brand the noise seemed terrific, but in the pre-dawn quite was no evidence that he had been heard. Swiftly he bent and gagged the guards with their own handkerchiefs, then bound them together with their belts.

CHAPTER FIVE

Renegade Wings

"**A**LL SET," he snapped. "Let's go!" And at that moment, before they could take a step, came a heart-chilling

interruption. A thunderous concussion rent the eerie stillness and a yellow glare of flame lighted the field! Out on the tarmac appeared a gaping crater! A second stunning explosion followed, then others. Brand and Steele were lifted and flung heavily against the ground. Startled yells came from hangars and barracks. Flame spouted from the last hangar in the line, to send a wavering tower of scarlet into the sky. A siren wailed shrilly as men poured from every direction.

A half-dozen more explosions followed swiftly, one blending into the next. Half stunned, the outlaw Yanks crawled to their feet. In the uproar no one paid the slightest attention to the two figures beside the shattered guard house door.

"God!" Brand jerked. "They're bombing the field—and there are no planes overhead! How—"

He paused, listening vainly for any sound of winged raiders. But save for the pandemonium on the ground, there was no sound of motors.

His mind was in a whirl. How did they do this thing? But Steele yelled:

"Now's our chance! Come on!"

As they moved out into the blinding flashes of light, neither Yank saw or heard the two phantom figures which leaped at them from behind. Brand started to whirl, warned by some instinct. He was just in time to see Steele slump forward from a glancing blow on the head. Then something heavy and wielded by terrific force smashed down on his own skull. The uproar and lights faded into a star-shot void of pain.

Half consciousness returned to Brand quickly. He was vaguely aware that he was being half carried, half dragged, through a border of trees and across a field. From somewhere close by he heard the muffled *thock-thock-thock* of an idling motor. Then he was lifted, crammed into a cockpit. He strove frantically to fight, but his flaccid muscles would not

obey his will. He remained helpless as a belt was snapped tightly across his body. The next moment the plane lurched into motion, soared into the night sky.

For a few moments Brand again succumbed to the bursting pain in his head. When he recovered for the second time his brain cleared. He found himself in the rear pit of a two-seater which was droning steadily deeper and deeper into the mountainous region between the lines. He tried to free himself but discovered that his bonds were too tight for him to loosen in that cramped space. For a half hour the ship roared on, then began to circle. A yellow signal flare dropped over-side.

Almost instantly a lighted lane appeared on the ground a thousand feet below, and the two-seater's motor died to a faint rumble as the plane glided in for a landing. The instant that the taxiing ship halted, a dozen figures surrounded it. Brand was roughly dragged to the ground. He had time for one quick glance around before he was shoved across the field.

It was a large field, and the growing light of dawn disclosed makeshift canvas hangars and roughly constructed shacks. On either side peaks loomed above the drome, but at one end the tarmac terminated in what appeared to be a sheer drop. The top of the canvas hangars were cunningly camouflaged, and Brand realized that from the air, only a careful inspection would disclose the valley's secret. At one side a huge shelf of rock projected from the mountain, and a huge canvas curtain concealed what might have been underneath. Brand needed no further proof to know that here was Anton Bergwitz' hidden base, the headquarters of the mutinous staff.

"Bergwitz wasn't sure how much I might have heard last night," he thought grimly. "That's why he went to all the trouble of kidnapping me!"

By this time his guards had halted him before a square, stone box of a building. Brand was shoved through the door, two pistol muzzles jammed in his back. The giant form of Anton Bergwitz was bent over a packing box which he was apparently using as a desk. The ex-lifer greeted Brand with a grimace of unholy triumph.

"Welcome to my field," he said softly. "I believe I told you we'd meet again? Taking you was so easy, *Herr Brand!* While your drome was being bombed, one of my ships landed in a nearby field. In the panic caused by the raid, the rest was very easy."

"You've gone to a lot of trouble for nothing," Brand growled. "I'm not rich like the others, you know!"

The sudden flare that lighted Bergwitz' eyes told that the chance shot had scored. Then the German waved to the guards. "Take him out and see that he's placed in the single guard room. And put one of my pets on guard! Brand, I'm not afraid of what you might have told your superiors. The fact that my men found you just as you escaped from under guard proves that you weren't believed. But I intended to take no chances. Besides, I have a personal score to settle with you!"

Brand looked at Bergwitz' smashed and swollen face and laughed hardily. A killer glare blazed in the Hun's eyes, then faded to a crafty gleam. Without another word Brand's guards marched him from the room.

He was taken directly toward what seemed to be the solid side of the mountain. As the group reached it, Brand saw that a small opening gave access to a black interior. He was forced inside, finding himself in a dank, rock-walled cave perhaps fifteen feet in diameter. The hard-faced Germans outside busied themselves for a few minutes with some task, then Brand could see them re-crossing the field. For a half hour he remained quiet while the gray dawn brightened into full

day. For the life of him he could see nothing to prevent him from leaving the cave.

Scrubby bushes grew along the base of the cliff, and they might afford him enough concealment from those on the field. Cautiously he began to edge his way out of the opening. The next instant a huge, hairy body leaped at him, grinning jaws displaying fearsome fangs. A savage growl split the air. Instinctively, Brand flung himself backward, and the clashing fangs snapped within inches of his face. He found himself staring at a huge German mastiff, saw the chain which prevented the animal from entering the cave! So that was what Bergwitz had meant by his "Little pet!"

For a few moments the savage brute strained until the chain creaked in his efforts to launch himself at Brand's throat. Finally he subsided into watchful waiting, red eyes gleaming. Brand realized instantly that there was no possible way to leave the cave without coming within reach of the monster's jaws.

He thought of the grinning skeletons of the five missing squadron commanders and shuddered. Did this explain their ghastly fate? If it did, the theory he had built up was wrong.

At intervals of two hours, armed Germans approached, peered watchfully into the cave. They were taking no chances, Brand thought. At noon a bowl filled with rancid meat and mouldy bread was shoved inside. Famished though he was, Brand could bring himself to eat only a part of it before his stomach rebelled. Early in the afternoon he was aroused by a slight sound over his head. It was repeated several times, and suddenly he saw a small stick appear between two of the huge stones that formed the walls of the cave. As the stick was withdrawn, Brand pressed his mouth against the hole.

"Who is it?" he asked breathlessly.

A faint voice came back, muffled by the

two feet of stone and dirt between. As he listened, Brand's eyes widened.

"Bell! My God, everyone thought you were murdered!"

THE weak voice came back. "Not yet! Is that Brand? Listen, we're prisoners here; Reynolds, Mathers, two others and myself! Half starved, too. One by one this Hun tricked us, captured us!"

For a moment Brand's head swam dizzily. Bell and the others alive! The skeletons had been a fake, then! Though he had half suspected something of this sort, hearing the voice of Bell seemed hearing a voice from the grave. Then he swiftly explained the skeletons, all that had happened.

"Then why are we being held?" Bell's weak voice whispered.

Brand's retort was grim. "Bergwitz was sentenced to life imprisonment in the States for a murder committed during a kidnapping. And I'll bet that's exactly what he's got you here for! You're all wealthy men; your families would gladly pay heavy ransoms in exchange for your lives! When the time is ripe, Bergwitz will act. Perhaps he intends holding you until the end of the War! And he has a second reason, too. He wanted you men out of the way, wanted the pursuit squadrons in this sector demoralized, to aid in some devilish scheme he's planning. I don't know yet what it is. Listen, any chance of you making a break?"

"Not a chance," came Bell's answer. "We found this stick in here, and have been all day poking this hole through, after we found out someone was in there. But there's a heavy locked door at the end of this cave."

"Don't give up," Brand urged. "I'm gonna get out of here!"

Dusk was beginning to fall as he stepped away from the wall. From just inside the mouth of his cave he could see the curtain which concealed the space under the huge

shelf of rock. Men were passing in and out, carrying huge black objects that Brand suddenly recognized as bombs. He came to a swift resolution. Dog or no dog, he had to learn what was taking place!

He waited until just after a guard had made his regular inspection. The man spoke to him, then passed on. Brand removed his leather coat and took off his tunic. Slipping the coat on again, he wrapped his flying scarf around his throat and re-enforced it with strips torn from the tunic. The leather coat would offer partial protection to his body. Then he crept noiselessly to the mouth of the cave. The next moment he dove headfirst into the open.

The mastiff came at him with a silent rush. Brand met the charge with a clubbing blow against the brute's head. The clashing fangs, driving straight at Brand's throat, caught in the folds of the scarf, momentarily snagged there. The driving weight of the dog's body threw the man to the ground.

In silence save for the whining breathing of the dog, the two rolled and fought. The dog jerked loose from the scarf and snapped his slaving fangs at Brand's face. He dodged, flinging up his arm. The terrible teeth closed on his forearm, clamped until pain beat dizzily at Brand's brain. Then the brute, trying for a better hold, opened his mouth. Instantly Brand jammed his arm far back in the mastiff's jaws, locking the fearful hinges open. The man's other hand clamped about the animal's windpipe and contracted.

The mastiff's hind legs dug frantically at Brand's middle, shredding the tough leather of his coat. Once that protection was gone, the man knew those rasping claws would disembowel him in split-seconds. He flung his body forward, pinning the animal beneath his great weight. And all that time his left hand twisted and tightened. Every muscle in the American's

big body stood out like steel cables as he fought for his life.

Slowly the brute's struggles lessened and his breath came in great wheezing gasps. Then Brand dropped the dog's throat, slid his arm beneath the animal's neck. His big body straightened, his right arm jammed swiftly down. Something cracked, like the snapping of a dry stick, and the mastiff became instantly limp. Brand heaved the carcass into the bushes and drifted cautiously toward that curtained cavern.

The brush along the base of the cliff shielded him as he approached. He reached a corner of the curtain, peered eagerly inside. Instantly he stiffened in astonishment. Here was the explanation of the mysterious bombing, of the way in which the skeletons had been dropped. For the cavern was filled with huge sailplanes!

Brand had seen gliders before, but none the size of these! They had the wing-spread of Gothas, but the men working around them seemed to have no difficulty in tilting the big wings. Here was the shadowy monster that Brand had encountered two nights before over the drome of the 77th! Breathlessly he watched as mechanics secured bombs in neat rows under the monster's bellies. Brand scowled. These motorless ships certainly couldn't take off with this load! Then he noticed the coils of flexible cable secured to the nose of each glider. That was it! They were to be towed!

Nothing could be plainer than that Bergwitz could be planning a raid in force. Brand remembered the conversation between von Gershin and Bergwitz. The General had said that Bergwitz' plan was impossible, that it had been tried before. What possible objective could the bombers have that was protected by the five pursuit squadrons? The answer came to Brand with nerve-shattering impact. Crecy! The huge munitions plant

at Crecy, fifty miles behind the lines! As soon as the thought entered his brain he felt sure he was right. Then a cold voice drawled behind him: "Lost your way, *Herr Brand*?"

As the Yank whirled, he saw Bergwitz standing a few feet away, a leveled automatic trained on Brand's heart.

The German whistled shrilly, and several men came forward. His arms clamped in the grasp of two burly soldiers, Brand was hurried back to the cave and thrust inside. Bergwitz squatted outside, fury mounting on his twisted face.

"It seems I underestimated your nerve and strength, *Herr Brand*. I won't again. When I leave, two guards will be left outside. I hear from your Major Bell that you've been talking with him. *Ja*, you were right; when the time comes those five *schwein* will be worth plenty to me!"

"So you're going to have a try at bombing the Crecy munitions plant with those gliders!" Brand jeered.

Bergwitz' eyes widened. "So you *did* hear, that night! *Ja*, for a hundred thousand marks I can accomplish anything!"

"But Crecy is defended by expert anti-aircraft gunners—a complete ring of them! There are searchlights, electric ears, every kind of defense."

Bergwitz' eyes gleamed with fanatic fires. "What good will their sound equipment be against noiseless gliders? My planes will tow them to a great elevation. Miles from Crecy the lines will be dropped and the gliders will go on alone. I have a man who will signal the exact target, and then all the bombs will be dropped at once! Before your *schwein* on the ground know an attack is being made, the plant will be a shambles!"

Abruptly the Hun disappeared, but Brand could see the two guards alertly on watch. In five minutes, a slight sound attracted him.

Something was happening outside! One of the guards had fallen silently to the

ground. The other whirled, mouth opened to yell. Simultaneously, Brand hurled his body from the mouth of the cave, landed full on the fellow's back. Steel fingers closed like talons on the German's throat. In a moment Brand straightened with a shudder. The Hun lay very quiet.

CHAPTER SIX

Hell in the Heavens

BRAND'S eyes flashed to a dark figure just straightening from the prostrate body of the second sentry. Steel glittered dully in the man's hand.

"Steele!" Brand hissed in astonishment. The ex-warden stepped close to him, drew him down in the shadows.

"Yeah, they only did half a job of clouting me, back at the 77th. I grabbed your Spad in the excitement, followed that two-seater. I landed a mile away. sneaked over here. I've been hiding outside in the bushes half the day. What's doing?"

Brand explained in a half-dozen curt sentences. "Come on, we've got to get going! They're towing the gliders out already!"

"You're going; I'm staying here!" Steele snapped. Then as Brand growled a protest: "It's the only way! I've been watching and they check up on the cave every little while. If they don't see anyone inside, the alarm will be out."

Brand saw the truth in Steele's argument instantly. There was no time for debate. He helped Steele prop the dead guards in life-like positions, then Steele crawled into the cave and lay flat on the floor in plain sight.

Brand sped swiftly toward the glider hangar, conscious that already the Mercedes in the tow-planes were warming. The lines had been fastened and now the two rows of ships were divided by the taut strands of flexible cable.

Brand chose the last glider in the line,

crept under the wing and crouched there.

A helmeted German appeared and stepped on the wing. Brand's big hand reached out, jerked the man flat on the ground. Instantly his clenched fists shut off the fellow's strangled cry of alarm. The Yank slammed his fist against the pilot's jaw, and the man relaxed with a grunt.

He had barely time to roll the Hun's body aside into the deeper darkness and throw himself into the pit when the glider jerked forward. Straight toward that open abyss the tow-plane roared!

For nearly a half hour the armada circled, until the icy upper air turned Brand's body blue with cold. When the formation was complete, the flight turned inexorably toward the Allied back areas.

Swiftly the whole picture raced through Brand's brain. The gliders would be released a few miles from the city, left to wing to their ghastly errand on soundless pinions. He made an abrupt decision. In the glider he could do nothing to halt them. But their progress would be slow, for the weight of the gliders hampered the speed of the Pfalzes. There might be time—

Before he could change his mind, Brand snapped loose his tow-line!

Then he banked the glider, heading toward the mountain drome. The Pfalz pilot would realize what had happened, but in the darkness his chance of finding the glider were scant.

Down he swept, and not until the roofs of the barracks huts were directly under him did Brand pull the bomb releases. He must be sure to avoid the two prison caves!

Even as the thought came to him, a tremendous booming explosion rent the silence of the night. Some of the hangars seemed to rise bodily into the air, and the thin shrieks of running men stabbed Brand's eardrums as he munched the glider in and landed. He was out of the

plane instantly, running toward the cave where he had left Steele.

The next moment he was peering into the cave where he expected to see Steele. Yet the cave was empty; Steele was gone! Brand did not pause. He snatched the pistols from the belts of the two dead guards and caught up one of the rifles. The next moment he paused before the door behind which Bell and the others were captives. The heavy door had been sprung by the blast of the bombs, and Brand inserted the rifle barrel and pried mightily. The rifle barrel bent, but at the same moment the weakened lock gave way. Bell, Mather, Reynolds, and two others staggered forth. They were scarecrow thin, clad in rags. But a burning fury glared on their faces.

"Follow me!" Brand yelled. No time now to search further for Steele. He led the way straight to the canvas hangars, praying that some of Bergwitz' planes would be still there. One glance showed several Pfalz fighters in the gloom. Bell and his companions sprang to cockpits and props.

Once in the air he waved a peremptory signal. The flight of squadron commanders fell in behind without hesitation.

With Mercedes revving at full throttle, Brand bored straight toward Crecy.

Miles flowed beneath the hurtling wings of the five Pfalz and Brand's eyes strained at the murk ahead.

Swiftly, winged shapes appeared in the darkness, caught by occasional glints of the dropping moon. Now the Huns saw them and were whirling uncertainly. Brand waved a signal, saw that Bell and the others understood. The gliders first!

BRAND came droning in at the first sail-plane, the Spandaus crackling with a long burst. He fired, not at the pilot, but at the black bombs nestling beneath the glider's wings. That first burst was true, and a sullen boom ripped

the glider into a myriad of drifting fragments. As the long tow-line fell, a Pfalz underneath ran squarely into it. The Maltese-crossed ship's prop flew into a million flying shreds.

Now all of Bergwitz' pilots were casting the gliders loose. The motorless planes swung on toward Crecy—and the berserk squadron commanders fell on them like avenging angels!

Bewildered by this sudden attack by ships of their own staffel, Bergwitz' flyers saw their cherished plans being wrecked. Brand swung between them and Bell's companions.

Two Pfalz went down before his spitting guns as Brand flew like a madman. Abruptly he became aware that the Huns were drawing back.

Then he divined the reason. Fire-spitting specks were arcing up from the dark earth! The defense outfit had taken the air, and a signal flare arced out from the cockpit of one of the Pfalz. In the brief glare, Brand glimpsed the wolfish face of Anton Bergwitz. As the Hun banked toward the mountains, Brand thundered in eager pursuit, leaving the mopping-up to Bell's men and the coming Yanks.

The earth was still blanketed in darkness, but here high in the sky dawn was throwing its first pale light. Closing slowly in on Bergwitz' fleeing ship, Brand jerked in astonishment. There was a man on the wing of the Hun's Pfalz! He saw that it was Steele!

As Brand came roaring in, a thought hammered persistently at his brain. He had only to blast Bergwitz down, and both the German and Steele would be finished! Steele was the only man who knew his secret, who could betray him. Once Steele was dead, Brand might never have to look at iron bars again. He lined the cockpit in his sights, then slowly his fingers relaxed. No! He'd been through too much with Steele in the past two days!

"Helluva killer you turned out to be!" he jeered at himself. "Going soft now!"

Then he slanted a long burst at Bergwitz' motor. The Hun came around with the ferocity of a cornered wolf. His Spandaus spouted flame and death. Coolly Brand jockeyed his ship with masterly skill and for the second time found himself in position. This time the slugs sped true! The prop of Bergwitz' plane shattered, the nose dropped abruptly.

Brand hovered watchfully as the Pfalz dropped to a forced landing. Not until the wheels were about to strike did Brand recognize the little field below as the one in which he had met Steele two days before.

Bergwitz' ship struck heavily, one wing low. Brand saw Steele's body fly from the wing, to land in a silent huddle fifty feet away. The ship went on, tumbling, to crumple into a twisted mass. Brand's own plane taxied to a stop a few yards away. He leaped out and dashed to Steele's side. The ex-warden stirred faintly, groaned.

"My leg! Broke, I guess—"

The sound of a jazzing motor interrupted him. Brand turned just in time to see Bergwitz settle in the pit of the Pfalz Brand had just landed. A curse grated in Brand's throat. Fool! Why hadn't he made sure of Bergwitz first? The Hun ruddered sharply, shot the scout forward at racing speed. He'd be sure to come back—to dive at the helpless Steele!

Brand flashed a glance around. There was no cover near, not a chance at escape. Then he remembered—the old R. E. 8! He raced toward the spot where leafy branches and grass half hid the ancient crate. Fingers flew to switch and throttle, and Brand tugged the prop through just as Bergwitz zoomed into the dawn. And the old motor coughed, roared into life!

No time to warm it! As it lurched forward, the big American tumbled into the pit, and cracked the throttle wide. The

aged engine bellowed defiantly as Brand sent it shooting over the grassy sod. Overhead he was vaguely aware that Bergwitz had banked, was nosing back down at that still figure in the middle of the meadow. Lead whined and whipped the ground scant feet from Steele's motionless body, then Bergwitz was banking, swinging about for another try.

This time Brand was waiting. He had recklessly zoomed the R. E. into the air, whipped it in a suicidal bank. Brand knew then that his first burst must do the job, for the R. E. had lost flying speed, was sagging. He centered the sights on the onrushing Pfalz, squeezed the trigger and the ancient Vickers leaped and throbbed. Tracer ripped across the sky, seemed to pass directly through the prop sheen to the head behind the cowling. Then the prop had shattered, and a faceless thing rose in the pit to lift tragic arms to the merciless heavens. The Pfalz nosed down and dove with a shocking roar into the earth. Anton Bergwitz had cheated the walls of San Quentin.

The R. E. pancaked down, to end in a splintered heap of fabric and wood—a gallant finish, a winner in her last fight. Brand crawled from the uptilted fuselage and came stalking to Steele's side, a huge, battered figure.

"Well," he said quietly. "I guess this is the end. Bergwitz' scheme is washed up; the truth ought to come out now. I

kept my part of the bargain, I showed you the action you wanted! You kept yours; you stuck with me."

Steele gazed quizzically at the giant before him. "If you hadn't risked your neck, just now, Bergwitz would have seen to it that no one turned you in! He found we'd tricked him just before he left the drome tonight, and tied me up, put me on the wing. He intended to shake me off after he got in the air. But I got my hands loose, and he couldn't do it.

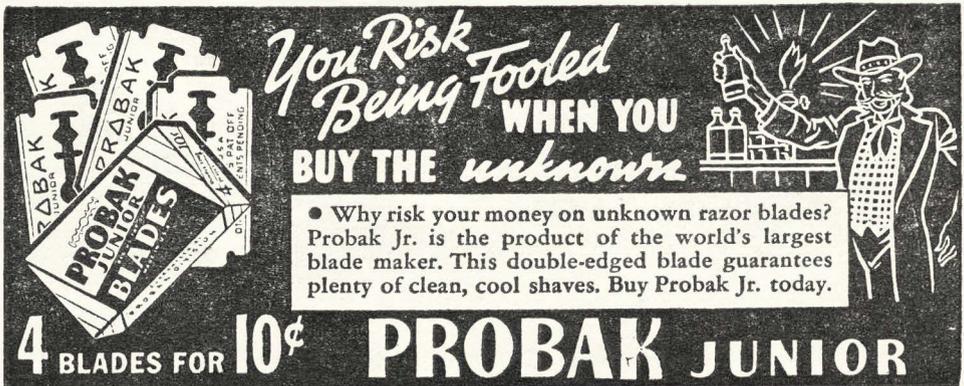
"There's something I wanted to tell you, and this is the first chance I've had. Last night, while I was waiting around the field at the 77th, a pilot tossed away a paper from the States he'd been reading. I picked it up. There was a story in it about a guy who'd confessed to a three-year-old murder; a murder for which a gent known now as Tex Brand went to prison!"

"You mean—" Brand's voice broke suddenly.

Steele nodded. "Of course, there'll be a bit of red tape. But I'm sure they'll forget the prison break, viewing your war record, and so on. Now, before you lug me to a first aid station, do you want to shake?"

Tex Brand hesitated, then his great hand shot out. A weary grin lighted his battered face. A renegade no longer! Brand knew that there'd be no more nightmares of prison bars!

THE END



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Story Behind the Cover

THE story behind this cover shouldn't be hard for you fellows to figure out. It's simply a case of some Handley-Page "Heyfords" getting into a lot of trouble with some German Heinkel He51's. Where the action is taking place, I don't know. I guess you had better use your imagination and set the battle any place you choose to.

The Handley job is an old story, so we'll see what we can find out about the Heinkels.

For one thing, they were the first, or at least one of the first military types to be adopted by the revived German Air Force. The Germans are forever building war machines, it seems, and it's really a tough job keeping up with those boys.



Anyhow, the He51 gets its juice from a single 600/750 h.p.

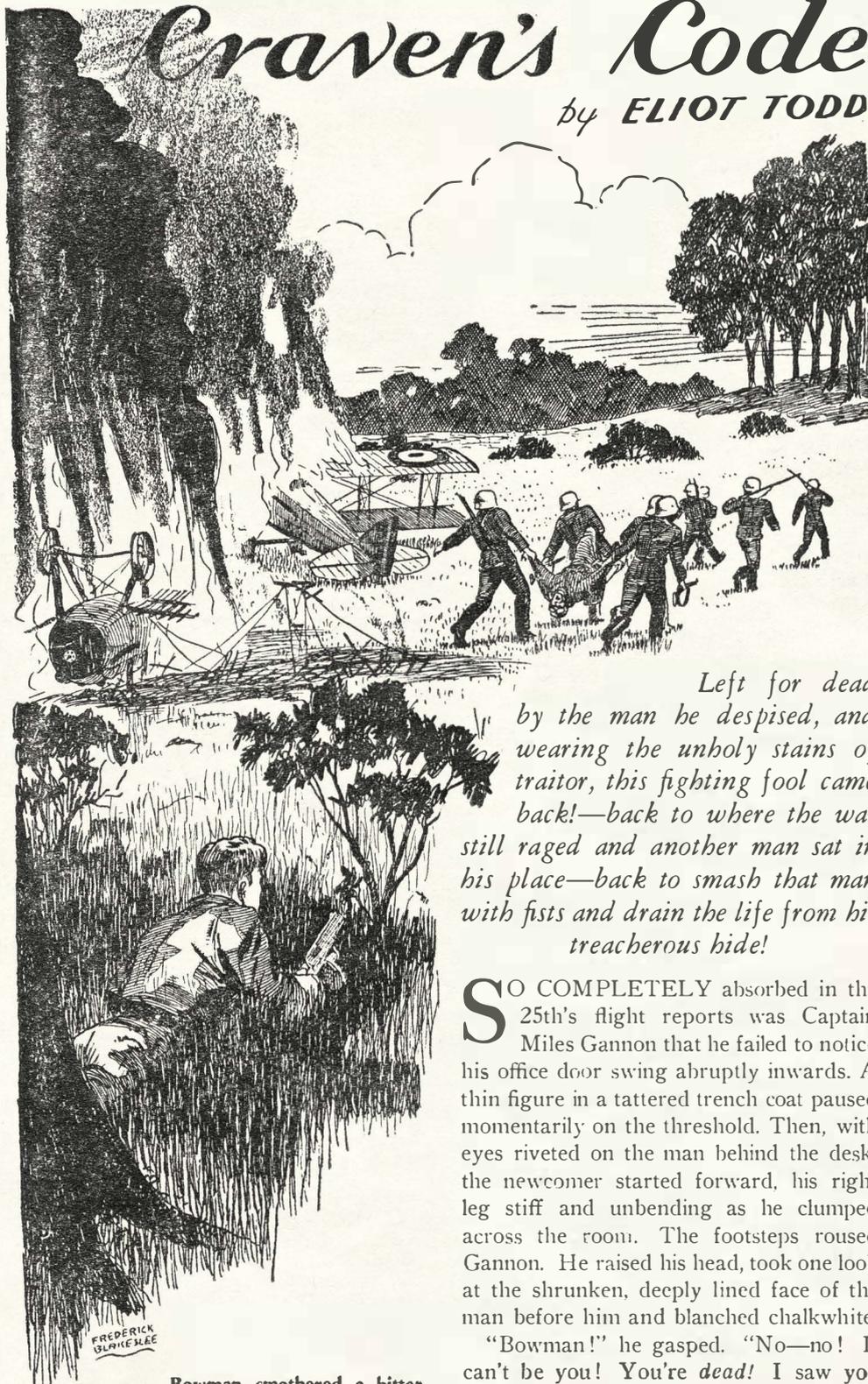
B.M.W. V1, twelve cylinder engine, which is also Vee water-cooled, ungeared and supercharged. This gives the crate a speed of 217 m.p.h. at sea level, which is somewhat faster than walking.

I've found myself particularly impressed with the design of this ship, and for that reason more than any other, stuck it on the cover. But I suppose that's a weakness we all have—picking out things that appeal to our eyes. But granting that the ship is a beauty, the authorities are not too impressed with its present power plant. They think it may be inferior to British ships of the same class. Personally, I'm inclined to agree, but I still think the Heinkel He51 is a swell looking crate. How about it?

Fred Blakeslee.

Craven's Code

by ELIOT TODD



Left for dead by the man he despised, and wearing the unholy stains of traitor, this fighting fool came back!—back to where the war still raged and another man sat in his place—back to smash that man with fists and drain the life from his treacherous hide!

SO COMPLETELY absorbed in the 25th's flight reports was Captain Miles Gannon that he failed to notice his office door swing abruptly inwards. A thin figure in a tattered trench coat paused momentarily on the threshold. Then, with eyes riveted on the man behind the desk, the newcomer started forward, his right leg stiff and unbending as he clumped across the room. The footsteps roused Gannon. He raised his head, took one look at the shrunken, deeply lined face of the man before him and blanched chalkwhite.

"Bowman!" he gasped. "No—no! It can't be you! You're dead! I saw you burn—"

Bowman smothered a bitter curse.

A laugh like the sound of a rasp file cutt him short.

"Quite a jolt, eh, Gannon! You didn't expect to see me again this side of hell, did you? Well, I didn't burn—entirely, thanks to the Boches! But remember the smell of my leg roasting? Remember how I begged you to pull me out of the pit? The flames were pretty high by then, Gannon!"

The C.O. wet his dry lips.

"That's a lie, Bowman! You never spoke a word! Was it my fault you crashed in that dog fight? I landed, yes, but before I could help the Boches started to come. There was no point in staying there to be captured. I swear I thought you were dead, so help me God!"

The harsh lines around Bowman's mouth twisted with disbelief.

"You rat!" he rasped. "You knew damned well I was alive! What's more, you knew I was carrying that envelope we picked up from the agent in Germany. So before you ran out you jerked it out of my pocket and left me there to roast! And when you got back you took all the credit—you reported me dead and branded me a coward! They treated you like a hero after that little yarn, didn't they? They gave you a nice shiney medal, a captaincy and command of this outfit!"

Gannon felt the sweat oozing out of his armpits, soaking his body.

"You're out of your head, Bowman!" he blustered. "If you missed the envelope the Boches must have taken it!"

Bowman stepped around the desk and jerked the C.O.'s right arm up to the desk-top. A livid scar puckered the flesh on the back of Gannon's hand.

"There's the proof, Gannon!" he grated. "There's the mark of your treachery, left by the flames when you reached into my pocket to take the envelope! This is the end of your rope, Gannon! I figured it all out before I escaped from that Boche hospital. First, you're going to talk—then you're going to sign a statement that will

clear my name and give me the right to sit in a Spad once more!"

Gannon slobbered out half a tumbler of cognac with shaking fingers, downed it in a gulp. In a swift instant he pictured his reputation vanishing like a cloud wisp in a prop wash; saw his carefully planned career crumbling around him on its false foundations, all because of Bowman, back from the grave to accuse him. But above all this was Bowman's voice, each word cracking like a whiplash.

"The report of my death made a sensation in the papers back home. My mother was never strong. The shock killed her!"

Defiantly, Gannon looked up to meet Bowman's smouldering eyes. The liquor was coursing hotly through his veins, now. A surge of rat-like courage, born of desperation, swept over him. His hand dived into a drawer, reappeared with a Colt.

"Get out of my office, you bum!" he snarled. "I don't know you—never even saw you before—understand? Officially you're dead—a man without a country. You've got no papers, no uniform, nothing to identify yourself. Actually you're interfering with an officer of the United States Army in the performance of his duties! I'd be within my rights to pump a slug into your heart and dump your carcass into the nearest ditch. But I'll give you a break this time, Bowman. So get the hell out!"

Bowman's next move, whatever it might have been, was checked by the sudden screech of locked wheels and the slam of a car door outside the Operations shack. Gannon tossed the Colt into the drawer just as a stocky, broad-shouldered officer stepped quickly into the room. With an expression of alarm on his flushed face, the C.O. jumped to his feet.

"Colonel Dagget!" he stammered. "I—er—is there something wrong, sir?"

“WRONG? Certainly there's something wrong!" Dagget exploded, striding forward and placing a square,

leather-covered case on the C.O.'s desk. "Dammit, in spite of everything we've done, the Boches are still shelling our positions in this sector with uncanny accuracy! Ammo dumps, supply depots and railheads are being destroyed like clockwork. It's almost as if the German's had every inch of this territory photographed and ranged! Are you positive, Gannon, that we've kept the Hun two-seaters bottled up on their side of the lines? Are you sure you've followed my instructions to the letter? If you haven't, by God, I'll—"

"Absolutely, sir!" Gannon shot back. Bowman though he seemed relieved that the Colonel's visit was apparently on routine business. "As you ordered, sir," the C.O. continued, "for the past two days we've been flying alternate two hour patrols with 70 Squadron, protecting this sector between Challet and Etrelle. I can positively state that no German two-seater has crossed the lines at anytime when there was light enough to make photos. However, a Rumpler has been reported several times lately in German air, flying on a course parallel to the lines and escorted by von Khoeler's staffel."

Dagget waved a stubby hand and glowered at the C.O. through shaggy eyebrows.

"Nonsense, Gannon!" he snorted. "The positions I refer to are located from ten to fifteen miles behind our lines. Obviously, the Rumpler couldn't have made photos of those points with any degree of detail. No, there must be some other explanation. I—"

Dagget broke off suddenly, noticing for the first time the gaunt figure of Bowman in the background. He flashed a questioning look at the C.O. After a frantic instant of groping for a plausible explanation, Gannon smiled affably.

"Sorry, sir," he murmured. "Colonel Dagget, Lieutenant Bowman. The Lieutenant has been—er—slightly under the weather lately, so I've relieved him of ac-

tive duty until he feels better.

Dagget stared curiously at Bowman's grim face for an instant. Then, apparently satisfied, he dismissed the incident and turned back to the C.O.

"As I was saying, Gannon," he continued. "There must be some other explanation. But for the moment we can't be concerned with reason. The point is, this shelling must stop immediately! Otherwise, by tomorrow this entire division will find itself without food, medical supplies or ammunition!"

"We're almost positive that the guns doing most of the damage are four batteries of .155's east of Challet. But just exactly where the guns are located we don't know. If we did we could do some shelling ourselves. So that's where you come in, Gannon. Obviously, with von Khoeler in control of German air, a two-seater wouldn't have a ghost of a show to photograph those gun emplacements. However, I believe a couple of Spads would have a fighting chance to sneak past von Khoeler's blockade and snap a picture before the Boche realize what it's all about!"

Dagget jerked his head toward the leather case on the desk. "There's the camera!" he clipped. "I want it mounted on a Spad immediately! Then with another ship to act as escort I want a photo made of this section here!"

Dagget indicated the objective on the C.O.'s desk map. Gannon stood up, a suave smile on his thin lips.

"Certainly, sir," he agreed smoothly. "Your orders will be followed out to the letter. I expect the squadron back within two hours. Just as soon as—"

"Two hours!" Dagget exploded. "Hell almighty, you damn fool, anything can happen in two hours! *Now* is the time to act. Unless those guns are stopped they can blast away at us all night. It's now or never! Step on it!"

The smile on Gannon's face faded into

a worried frown and his eyes shifted.

"There's not a pilot left on the field, sir," he began. "I can't—"

"Well, what's the matter with yourself!" Dagget cut in acidly. "You can fly, can't you?"

"Of course, sir. Of course!" Gannon hastened to assure him. "But you spoke of another pilot. As I said before—"

Dagget whirled toward Bowman. "What's the matter with this man?" he snapped. "He looks like a real pilot. I'll bet he could slam a Spad sideways to hell and back!"

Gannon bit his lips. "Just as you say, sir!" he got out with an effort. "We'll take off immediately!"

THE feel of a ship under him once again was like tonic to Bowman. The roar of the Hisso, the rush of cool, clear air past the pit filled him with a new confidence. In the air it was man to man, and now at last he was on even terms with Gannon. Grimly he looked through the V-banks of the Hisso at the ship ahead. The C.O. was driving his Spad on a direct course towards Challet even as he had planned. Bowman remembered Gannon's words, a few minutes before.

"We'll make a quick stab into German air. I'll snap the photo and then we'll get the hell out of the way of trouble!"

Unconsciously Bowman nodded. That was Gannon all over; a swift deceitful move to win his goal, then a runout powder. But with luck the plan might work; success lay in evading von Khoeler. Bowman shrugged and glanced upwards. The thought of Gannon escaping him, through death at the hands of the wily German, persisted in running through his mind. Nothing but a few scattered cloud puffs met his anxious eyes. He sighed with relief, then glanced overside. Already the lines had slipped beneath their trucks; the Spads were now drilling through German air!

Suddenly Gannon gunned the ship and swung more to the east. Bowman followed, climbing slightly to act as top cover man. Below, he began to identify the landmarks pointed out by Dagget—the intersection of three roads and beyond it an irregular patch of woods. A dark haze hanging over the trees attracted his attention. He looked closer, saw a stab of flame followed by a rush of black smoke billowing upwards. The guns! He glanced ahead, wondering if Gannon had seen.

For a few seconds the C.O. flew straight ahead, holding his ship on a steady course over the patch of trees, then he slammed around and came streaking towards the lines under full gun. Bowman spun on a wing tip and fell in alongside. Gannon nodded curtly and pointed toward the camera, slung outside the pit. He had the picture! Now back to the drome to finish the showdown with Gannon. But even as he breathed the thought the heavens were split with a chorus of man-made thunder!

Bowman looked upward and saw five winged projectiles rocketing down with a red and white checkerboard D 7 in the lead. Already tracers were stabbing through the Fokkers' prop sheens as pilots tripped warming bursts. As he reached for the loading handles, Bowman glanced at Gannon. The C.O.'s hand went up in a signal, the first two fingers spread wide apart. Bowman remembered their old maneuver. Instantly the two Spads rolled away in opposite directions, leaving only empty space as a target for the blast of Spandau lead. Five hundred feet under the Yanks, the Fokkers checked their plunge and leveled off into a terrific zoom. As the ships shot upwards, the twin Spads arrowed down with Vickers ablaze. Two Fokkers staggered in mid air, then slipped backward as Death crossed their pits. A yell of triumph ripped through Bowman's clenched teeth.

"Two in the bag, von Khoeler!" he roared. "How do you like those apples!"

But a split instant later, tracers were snapping past his head as von Khoeler looped and came boring in on his flank. Bowman kicked into a spin, reversed controls and hauled out. A blur of gaudy light streaked overhead. Bowman heaved on the stick and jabbed the trips; the Vickers stuttered a ten shot burst that missed the checkerboard pit by a scant foot. The German ace zoomed like a rocket, flipped over and came slashing down. Three hundred feet over Bowman's head, the Spandaus clattered once, then went silent. His guns jammed, von Khoeler spun around in the ship's length and high-tailed it towards Germany.

Their leader crippled, the remaining Fokkers cut out and fell in beside the checkerboard to escort it home. That is, all but one. The last Boche clung doggedly to Gannon's tail, resisting every move of the Yank to shake him loose. As Bowman plunged down to aid Gannon, he saw the twin Spandaus crash a ten round burst into Gannon's Hisso. But before Bowman could trip his guns on the Fokker, the Boche whirled away and burned up the air in the wake of his flight mates.

Cursing, Bowman saw the C.O.'s motor shoot black smoke from its stacks, then grind to a stop. Already he was picturing Gannon in a crash landing, the camera smashed and the only proof of the C.O.'s treachery sealed by his dead lips.

But Gannon still had control. The C.O. was tooling the Spad expertly down towards a patch of clearing between two wooded hills, a mile from the gun emplacements. A small brook bordered one side of the clearing and for a moment it looked as if the C.O. would overshoot the tiny field and crash into the stream. But Gannon pulled a desperate ground loop at the last second to kill speed. The Spad skidded wickedly as the tail whipped up, then came to a stop, flopping over on its back.

Heart pounding, Bowman set down and raced over to the wreckage. Gannon hung by his safety belt, unconscious. Working feverishly, Bowman eased the C.O.'s body to the ground and dragged it a short distance away. Next he removed the camera, then tossed a lighted match under a dripping gas line.

Gannon was still unconscious, and for a moment Bowman considered strapping the C.O. on the wing of his ship and flying back to the 25th. But what would that get him? Once back on the drome, Gannon would be in a position to deny everything, as he had done before. Bowman shook his head savagely. Here it was *he* who had the advantage, not Gannon! He'd make the C.O. sweat blood first, then force him to sign a statement! But for that Gannon had to be roused.

After pocketing the C.O.'s Colt, Bowman stripped off the man's helmet, jumped up and ran as fast as his stiff leg would permit towards the brook. At the edge of the stream, scooping up water with Gannon's helmet, he was suddenly aware of guttural shouts and the rattle of bayonets being fitted to rifles! Bowman inched cautiously up the bank, then ducked back as he saw a squad of Boches rush into the clearing. At a sharp command one man suddenly detached himself from the group and raced straight towards his place of concealment.

In one wild leap, Bowman flung himself backward and into the reed-filled stream, submerging his body until only a tiny portion of his face remained above water. After a moment, the German appeared on the brow of the bank and glanced right and left. Then, raising his Mauser, he fired three shots aimlessly into the water. Satisfied when no movement followed, he turned and jogged back to his companions.

With his clothes streaming water, Bowman crept from the brook only to discover that in place of only one, there were now two columns of smoke swirling upwards!

A quick look over the bank showed his own ship in flames!

Bowman smothered a bitter curse as he realized his plan to force a confession from Gannon was now hopelessly wrecked. Resisting a mad impulse to leap up and blaze away with his Colt, Bowman forced himself to lay still. He could hear the commands of a dapper young *Unterleutenant* who stood over Gannon's motionless form, the camera held carefully under his arm. The officer wheeled as the Boche with the smoking rifle snapped to attention.

"You killed him?" the officer inquired.

The man shook his head. "*Nein, excellenz,*" he answered. "I fired merely to frighten him out of hiding. But there was no sign of the *schwein* Yankee!"

"What does it matter?" the officer shrugged carelessly. "The pig will be captured eventually." He turned to an N.C.O. "I must return to my post at the guns immediately! This," he indicated the burning Spads and Gannon's body with a jerk of his head, "is a matter for the Air Service. Von Khoeler's drome is the nearest, so you will deliver this carrion there, hand over this camera, and report the whole incident. *Schnell!*"

THE *Unterofficer* handed the camera to the non-com, wheeled and strode briskly off into the woods. Powerless to interfere, Bowman was forced to watch the Boches gather up Gannon's inert body and tramp off in the opposite direction. As the Germans disappeared from view, a fit of bitter rage seized Bowman. He was stranded alone in Germany, his ace card trumped by Fate. But a second later his iron will took command. A swift calculation proved the Front could be no more than three miles to the westward. The short distance, coupled with the fact that he had noticed no roving patrols in the vicinity, convinced him that the odds of reaching the lines were greatly in his favor. But to return empty handed—

without the camera and its vital plate—that was unthinkable to the gutty Yank, even though trailing Gannon invited recapture. This last was a bitter thought, with the picture of the prison hospital so vivid in his memory.

Accordingly, he scrambled to his feet and struck off in the wake of the Boches. For perhaps fifteen minutes he stumbled on through the underbrush, not daring to use the winding, twisting path, but guided alongside it by the jibes and coarse laughter of the Germans. Suddenly the increased light and thinning trees warned him of the nearby drome. Edging cautiously forward for the last few feet, Bowman bent over and brushed aside the screen of brush. He surveyed the field at a glance. Three tent hangars bordered the nearer edge of the drome, their rear walls directly in front of him. Adjoining the last hangar was a hastily knocked-together shack covered with tar paper. From a point somewhere beyond the hangars came the rumble of idling motors.

Bowman ducked back as the Germans suddenly emerged from the woods a dozen or so yards to his right. Anxiously he looked for the camera, saw it carried by the non-com in the lead. Next in line came Gannon, sagging between two stalwart Boches, supported by shoulders and feet. As the Germans shuffled towards the tar paper shacks, he saw Gannon struggle once in a futile attempt to break free. Somewhere along the trail the C.O. had regained his senses! Bowman smiled grimly, imagining his panic.

Then abruptly the Boches disappeared from view around the corner of a shack. Moments later a door slammed and Bowman heard the non-com order one man to remain as guard. After a careful survey of the building, Bowman decided it must be some kind of a storage shack. Certainly it was not suitable for living quarters, with its crude construction and the single window at the rear, covered with waxed paper.

Eyes alert, Bowman stepped quickly over to the window. Not a sound filtered through the flimsy covering, and reassured, he ripped off the paper as silently as possible and drew himself up through the window. Inside, he found himself in a tiny room, partitioned halfway to the ceiling, its walls lined with canned goods. Grasping the top of the partition, Bowman chinned himself up. A glance showed the building was divided into a low row of storage cubicles, with a single corridor along the outside wall. One of those rooms held Gannon and the camera! But which one?

Dropping lightly back to his feet, Bowman inched open the door. A guard stood a few feet away, leaning idly against the wall, his rifle propped against a door. He held a grayed letter in his hand, reading it with painful movements of his lips. Gathering himself, Bowman leaped into the corridor and charged forward. With a grunt of surprise the Boche dropped the letter and made a clumsy grab for the rifle. But before he could bring it to bear, Bowman's right lashed out and smacked against the man's jaw with the sound of a grapefruit stopped by a brick wall. Knocked cold, the Boche toppled backwards and crashed to the floor, Bowman whirled, rapped sharply on the door.

"Gannon!"

There was a rush of footsteps inside the room, then Gannon's voice, choked with terror.

"Bowman!" he gasped. "For God's sake, get me out of this! I'll do anything, give you anything, only get me out, quick!" The words tumbled from Gannon's lips, one after the other in a mad, hysterical rush. "Listen, Bowman! I didn't tell you this, but yesterday I killed von Khoeler's brother! The kid was cold meat with a dead motor, but I needed that victory to make me an ace—so I let him have it! Von Khoeler knows it was me who did it and when he finds out I'm here, God help

me! Bowman, get me out of this!"

Bowman leaned closer to the door, contempt and disgust written on his lined face.

"Get this, Gannon!" he rapped. "Everything's all set! I've K.O.'d the guard out here and there's at least three ships ticking over on the line. The coast is clear, understand? But before I unlock this door I want that statement! That it was me, *not* you who contacted the G-2 man. And that you deliberately left me wedged in a burning ship after removing the envelope from my pocket! When I have that, you'll get your freedom, but not before!"

Inside the room Bowman could hear the hurried scratch of a pencil, and seconds later a square of paper was shoved under the door. After a glance at the wording, Bowman stuffed the confession into his pocket and turned the key. Gannon leaped into the corridor, his face drawn with fear and suspense.

"Come on!" he ripped out. "Let's get the hell out of here!"

Bowman caught the C.O. by his arm and spun him around.

"Not so fast!" he clipped. "'Where's the camera?"

Impatiently Gannon shook himself free. "How should I know?" he snarled. "To hell with the damned thing. I'm getting out!"

Bowman's hand closed around the C.O.'s open shirt collar. "The camera first!" he grated. "Let's go!"

Outside the drome was deserted. His back clamped to the building, Bowman pointed towards a small, windowless shack nearby that he had not been able to see from the rear of the hangars.

"Looks like a dark room!" he clipped. "I'm betting they took the camera there!"

The Yanks covered the dozen yards in in nothing flat. Bursting through the doorway, they came to a dead stop, unable to see at first in the feeble light cast by a single red bulb in the wall. Gradually, de-

tails took form. Bowman made out a work bench along one side of the room, and on opposite walls hung two huge aerial photos. Then he discovered that the small building housed not one, but two rooms. Through a curtained opening he saw the faint outlines of a large developing tank. And next to that, resting on a rough table, was an aerial camera of a strange, new type. Leaving Gannon, he brushed through the doorway and stepped up to the table. In place of the usual single lens, six leather-covered barrels jutted out from the front of the camera at six different angles. For several seconds Bowman stared down at the strange instrument before an explanation clicked in his brain.

"Telescopic lenses!" he muttered excitedly. "Say, I'll bet that Rumpler of von Khoeler's was mapping our bases all the time without even crossing the lines!" Suddenly he remembered the two immense photos in the outer room. "That's the proof! No ordinary camera could photograph such an area or pick up such detail. Hell, with those photos to work with, no wonder the Boches are shelling our positions so accurately. All they have to do is locate the objective on the photo, figure the range and bang away!"

Bowman whirled at a slight noise behind him. Gannon stood in the doorway, a wolfish grin baring his teeth, eyes narrowed to slits. In one hand he held his own camera—in the other a Luger automatic!

"Get 'em up, wise guy!" he snarled. "You muffed the deal when you missed this gun on the work bench out there. The camera was there, too, only you didn't see that, either. But where you're going it won't make any difference! Before I put a slug between your eyes and hop into one of those crates out there, there's something I don't want to forget!"

Gannon plunged his hand into Bowman's pocket, withdrew the Yank's Colt and the confession. Then, raising his Luger, he started to back into the outer

room. But before he had taken three steps the outside door flew inward. Two Boches in tight fitting Air Service uniforms rushed into the building. Instantly the outer room was flooded with light from a powerful electric bulb overhead.

"Drop that gun, *Amerikaner!*"

Gannon's Luger clattered on the floor. His eyes were fixed in a glassy stare on the taller of the two Germans. Von Khoeler stepped forward warily, airt for a false move. Then for the first time the Boche noticed Bowman, standing behind Gannon's broad figure. Without turning his head, von Khoeler addressed his companion.

"I understood only one Yankee was brought here, Hemmig!" he snapped. "Yet now we have two. How is this?"

Von Khoeler's green eyes flickered from Bowman back to Gannon. Sudden recognition dawned on his thin face. He spoke before his aide could answer the question.

"*Lieber Gott*, Captain Gannon!" he husked. "So you the prisoner was, *hein?* And this other one came to your rescue! *Gott*, had I known the *Amerikaner* was you I would not have denied myself this pleasure an instant!"

He jerked up the Luger. Breathless, Bowman waited for the roar of the gun. But instead, von Khoeler lowered the Luger.

"*Nein*, that I cannot do!" he muttered half to himself. "Not even a dog could I shoot down in cold blood!"

OUT of the corner of his eye, Bowman watched the crafty sneer steal across the C.O.'s face. Quick to take advantage of von Khoeler's chivalry, Gannon's hand streaked out, jabbed a switch in the door casing. Bowman flung himself to the floor as the overhead light snapped out. Noiselessly he gathered himself, sprang at the dark figure of von Khoeler outlined against the dim red bulb in the wall.

Crack!

His fist crashed against bone and flesh. Von Khoeler collapsed, his gun rattling to the floor. Bowman reached out, felt his fingers close around cold steel. He whipped up the gun as a slug tore through his sleeve. Aiming at the flash he pulled the trigger. There was a gasp of agony as the gun roared, a heavy crash, then silence. On the field outside, motors blared out, then settled down to a steady drone.

Gradually Bowman's eyes adjusted themselves to the semi-darkness. He made out von Khoeler's crumpled form sprawled under the bench, and the lifeless body of the second Boche, near the door. Gannon was crouching in the far corner of the room, ashen white, his eyes still glazed with terror. Bowman grabbed up the new Boche camera and jerked Gannon to his feet.

"Cough up, Gannon" he rasped. "You know what I mean—the confession!"

"Sure, sure, Bowman!" The C. O.'s voice was brittle as he handed back the paper. "Sure you can have it! Hell, I was only kidding before. Honest, Bowman, it was just a gag, so help me!"

Stark terror contorted Gannon's face as Bowman started to back slowly towards the door, Luger leveled at the C. O.'s chest.

"Bowman!" Gannon's voice changed to a high pitched shriek. "You can't leave me here! I swear that as soon as we get back I'll make a full statement before Dagget to back up the confession. For God's sake give me a break!"

Bowman's smouldering eyes flashed with contempt.

"Shut up!" he rasped. "I don't owe you this, Gannon, but come on, get going! But remember—one wrong move and—" He waved the gun suggestively.

Outside, the sun was a blazing disk, low in the western sky. Three ships stood on the line, cockpits empty, perhaps fifty yards away, their motors slowly ticking over. Bowman checked the C. O. on the threshold.

"Probably a dusk patrol!" he husked. "Here, give me your camera and take the lead. I'll cover you!"

The two Yanks stepped out on the field. With the double advantage of the sun at their backs and their deceptive clothes—Bowman still in his trench coat and Gannon stripped to his O. D. shirt and breeches, the chances of making the ships unchallenged were with the Yanks. But with ten yards left to go, a hoarse shout of alarm from the rear caused them to leap forward. Heart thumping in his chest Bowman shot back a quick look. Somehow von Khoeler had fought his way back to consciousness! The wiry German was now leaping through the doorway.

Only then did Bowman notice that the first ship on the line was von Khoeler's. But Gannon, in the lead, rushed deliberately past the checkerboard and flung himself into the next ship. To Bowman, as he leaped for the checkerboard pit, it seemed strange that Gannon had left the nearest ship for him. Chivalry, even to a crippled runner, was certainly no part of the C. O.'s make up.

He shrugged away the thought and rapped throttle. Both crates lunged forward as one, went thundering across the field with a hail of slugs drumming through their wings. Once in the air, Bowman glanced down to see von Khoeler vault into the remaining ship and send it skimming down the runway.

In a few moments, Bowman made out the lines, marked by the pinpoint flashes of rifle fire. A minute later No-Man's-Land was under their trucks. He flung back a look. Von Khoeler's exhaust flares were still a quarter mile away, and a breath of relief hissed past his compressed lips.

But even as he ruddered towards the 25th's field, he saw Gannon's Fokker wheel sharply and bore in directly toward his flank! An instant later, flame jets spurted from Spandau muzzles and a trip-hammer blast of lead slammed through the pit!

Red rage coursed through Bowman's veins, whipped his blood to a froth.

"So that's the idea, you yellow louse!" he bellowed. "Pull the double cross when you don't need me any more, eh? And to protect your rotten hide you'd turn me into a torch, along with that little note you wrote! Like hell you will!"

Bowman cuffed stick and reached for the loading handles. As his crate spun around, Gannon's pit loomed in his sights. He punched trips, but no answering blast came from the twin Spandaus! Then like the shock of a slug came the reason why Gannon had passed up the checkerboard back on von Khoeler's drome. Remembering the German's gun jam that afternoon, and reasoning that it still might be uncleared, the crafty C. O. had played it safe and left him the crippled ship!

Now Gannon held the trump ace, and he knew it. Desperately, Bowman spun his ship through the darkness, but Gannon clung grimly to his tail, driving quick bursts into fuselage and wings. Suddenly a tracer creased Bowman's chest like a white hot lance, and with agony twisting his vitals he crumpled forward over the controls, head braced against the crashpad.

But Gannon in his moment of triumph had not reckoned with von Khoeler. His Mercedes shrieking like a demon gone berserk, the Boche ace plunged down on

the ruthless murderer of his brother. Now, no question of inequality stayed von Khoeler's hand as he reached for the grips. Gannon was armed with the same weapons. Coolly, he waited until Gannon's Fokker loomed up like a house in his center section. Then, with a guttural curse, he rammed hard down on the trips. Twin paths of fire leaped from his muzzle cups, arced down through the night and drilled into Gannon's motor. Bright flame licked out from the cowl as the ship nosed down for the last time.

For three thousand feet Bowman's Fokker continued its mad plunge to earth. Then, under the drive of his iron will, his limbs responded, found stick and rudder.

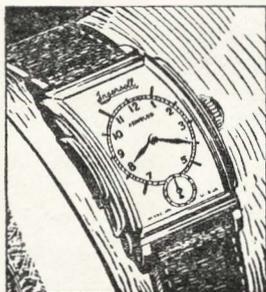
High in the heavens Gannon's ship was a fiery torch carrying him down to a traitor's doom. A mile to the eastward von Khoeler streaked back towards Germany, his brother avenged, and convinced that his camera had been destroyed in Bowman's spin to earth. With a grim smile Bowman throttled the Mercedes to cut his own exhausts and turned back to follow Gannon's path of flame through the sky.

Bowman could find no mercy in his heart for the man.

"So long, Gannon!" he rasped. "Happy landings—in hell!"

THE END

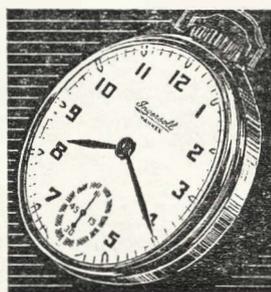
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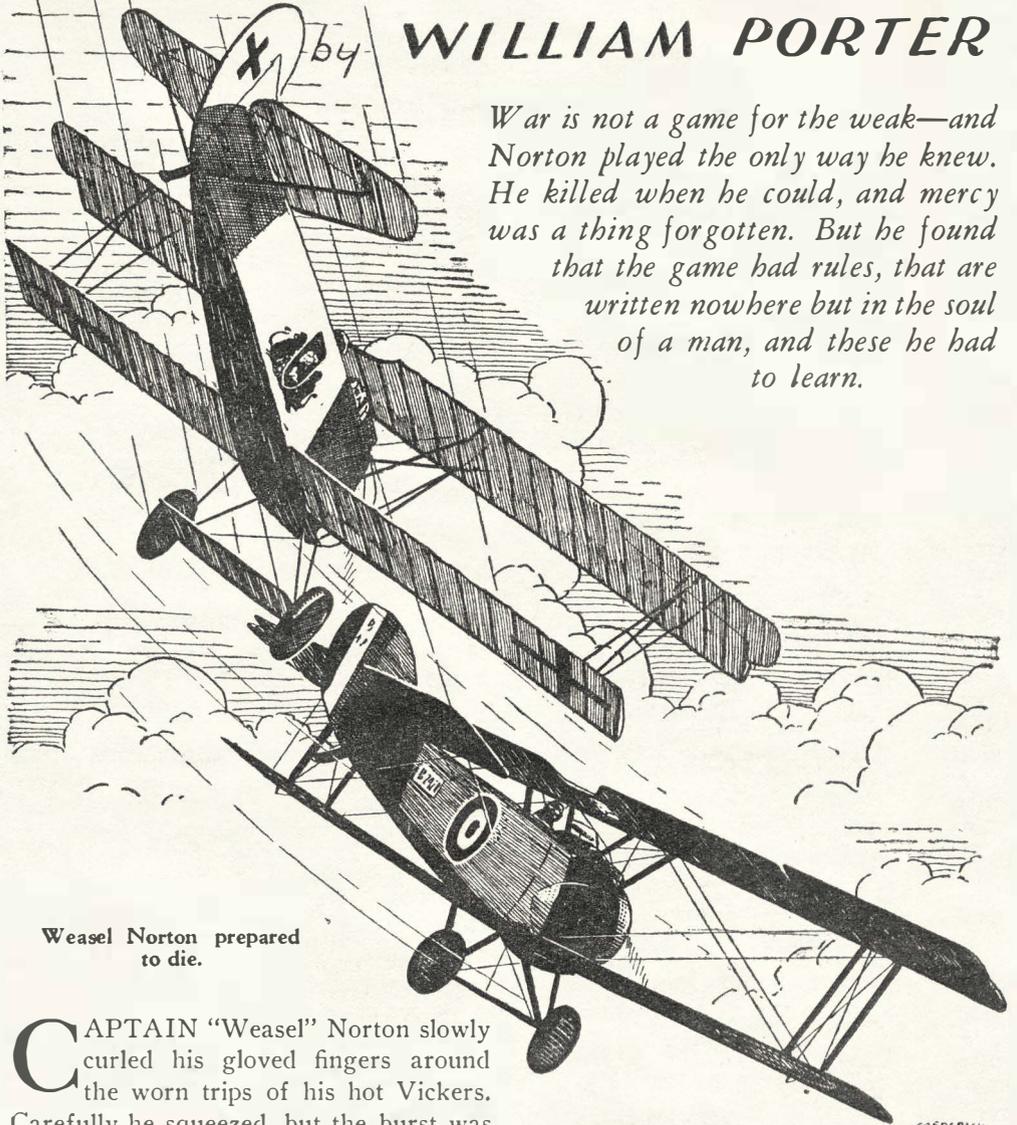


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The BLOODY ACE

by WILLIAM PORTER

War is not a game for the weak—and Norton played the only way he knew. He killed when he could, and mercy was a thing forgotten. But he found that the game had rules, that are written nowhere but in the soul of a man, and these he had to learn.



Weasel Norton prepared to die.

CAPTAIN "Weasel" Norton slowly curled his gloved fingers around the worn trips of his hot Vickers. Carefully he squeezed, but the burst was a trifle high. Through the cross-sight he could see the swerving form of the Albattross, twisting crazily in a futile attempt to escape. His face cold, he calmly sighted again. There was no danger of that Jerry giving him the slip, for the tail assembly was shot to pieces. The burst chewed into the fuselage inches behind the cockpit, and frantically the German lifted his hands in a signal of surrender. Calmly, coldly, Norton ripped in another burst—

a burst that nailed the screaming pilot to the firewall. Slowly the lifted hands fell, and the riddled flyer slumped below the coaming.

The black-crossed ship shook like a living thing, and then slipped into a screaming spin that hurled it into No-Man's-Land. Norton slowly pulled up the nose of his Camel and waggled his wings in a gesture of command. One by one his

war birds fell into formation behind him and headed home.

Minutes later, the wheels of the crates ticked on the field. Norton climbed from the pit, ripped off his helmet, and watched his men come in. Slowly they crawled from their ships and came over to the apron. He eyed them carefully.

"I suppose you men will give confirmation of my victory?" he asked in clipped syllables.

There was a dead silence.

"Victory?" The word slipped from the lips of a small, chunky pilot who stood staring at the ground. "I'd call it murder, Captain."

Norton's eyes glistened dangerously.

"Still at it, are you? And they call this a pursuit squadron! You birds make me sick."

The men stood silent. Norton spoke in clipped, hard phrases that fairly cut the air.

"I know you don't like it. You think I'm just a blood-sucker, a killer. You don't like it because I take advantage of the breaks. Hell, this isn't table tennis! This is war! And war, you yellow-bellies, is just the business of killing every Heinie you can get your sights on."

He paused and stared into their shocked eyes.

"I know, I know. You don't think it's *sporting*! It's not *cricket*! *Men* don't do that!" His jaw snapped like a steel trap. "The devil they don't. War's a bloody mess at its best, and it's my job to kill every German I see. The more I kill, the better soldier I am. And that goes for you, too!"

One of the pilots opened his mouth to speak.

"Shut up, Richards! Now get to the barracks." Norton jerked his thumb toward the long, low building that held the men's quarters and the mess room. "James, get me a file."

He watched them walk silently away,

swinging their helmets. The bands of his lips tightened for a moment, then he wiped his lips with the back of his hand. James, top greaseball, handed him a triangular file. Weasel strolled to the side of his Camel, vaulted into the pit, and carefully began working on the barrel of the right-hand gun. In a moment a neat notch was cut in the breech end of the metal casing. Norton ran his fingers down along the line of notches. Thirty-eight—thirty-eight victories in half that many weeks! He whistled softly under his breath as he walked toward his shack.

"It may be a little bloody," he muttered. "but that's war. A good soldier does that. And that's why I'm *Captain* Joseph Norton."

Captain Joseph Norton to himself and Headquarters, but just "Weasel" to his men—Weasel Norton.

IT WAS ten o'clock in the sultry summer morning, and the captain inspected the empty air with steel-colored eyes, searching the sky for a sign of enemy wings. The world seemed deserted. He ran his leather-fingered hand along the breech of the Vickers. It would be nice to make it thirty-nine. He gunned the motor and hauled the Camel into higher air, surveying the horizon.

Suddenly he knew that a plane was almost squarely on top of him. Before he could move, he saw it go flashing over, all but dragging its wheels on his stubby top wing. It was a Fokker! Quickly it flashed away, climbing rapidly. The pilot swung around, saluted jerkily with his hand, and slapped his crate into a screaming dive that flashed him back at the Weasel.

Norton needed no other invitation. A grim smile on his browned face, he clutched at the stick and sent the Camel upward. A warm-up burst ripped from his guns, and he settled himself firmly in the seat. This would be number thirty-nine. The Fokker loomed larger in his

sights and he grabbed the trips. Long fingers of tracer reached out and clutched at the white ship of the Jerry. Wide!

The Fokker's Spandaus howled in his face, and he saw a long line of holes eat into his lower wing. The Camel shook as slugs chewed into the cowl and bounced dangerously around his face. Then the German was passing over him, flashing back to ride his tail.

He moved with the speed of light. The stick came back into his lap and the Camel stood on its tail in a crazy zoom that carried him high above the Fokker. Like a flash he rolled, gunned the motor, and dived back down—squarely onto the tail of the Boche.

Again the Vickers rolled their song of death, and the tracer was closer, now. He watched it tear into the fuselage and crawl slowly up the fabric toward the German pilot. Norton noted the queer insignia. Carefully he pulled her nose up, ever so little. Now—

But the tracer never reached the D-7's pit. Norton's eyes popped as the Jerry shot into a crazy Immelmann that left his slugs tearing into empty air. He grabbed the stick and imitated the maneuver, trying desperately to cling to his deadly position on the tail of the Boche, but it was no use. The Camel was still climbing when Spandau slugs began to chew into his fuselage. He cut the gun and slipped from the line of fire.

Immediately the Fokker was on top of him again, sending boiling lead into the nose of the Camel. He ducked low behind the cowling, fear clutching for the first time at his heart as he heard the lethal song of slugs around his ears. How that Heinie could fly! He shoved the stick to the floor-boards in a desperate attempt that sent the Camel howling down in a vicious power dive. Down he plummeted, the Heinie still on his tail. Slugs smashed into the instrument board and sent the glass flying. It was almost over, and he

flung his hands up as the crate hurtled downward.

But suddenly the murderous fire ceased. He hazarded a glance over his shoulder, at the same time pulling the nose of the Camel up. The German was pounding on the breech of the Spandaus. His belts were empty!

Norton pulled the Camel's nose up until the prop was pointing at the sky. This was all he wanted. The motor howled as he swung into a climbing turn that took him back, flashing into the open air. The Fokker merely flattened and swung slowly, evidently waiting until he came nearer. Then, as his hands stole to the trips, Norton saw the German point to his guns and shrug his shoulders.

"Well, Kraut, what of it?" Norton snapped. "I suppose I should do the gallant thing—just because your guns are jammed—and let you fly on home, eh? The hell with that! I never read *that* in the book. You're going to get it, and right now!"

He centered the Fokker's cockpit in the sights and thumbed the trips. His smile was grim and cold as he waited for the leaden death to spew from his guns and take the Jerry pilot in the back—but nothing happened.

He cursed furiously and hammered at the loading breeches, then saw that it was a stoppage that couldn't be cleared in the air. Angrily he pulled the Camel off the German ship's tail and swung away, his face a hard mask.

The Hun pilot waved cheerily as he passed, and there was in the gesture an expression of gratitude. Norton snarled in disgust.

WEASEL NORTON pounded the oak bar and asked for cognac. A fat, one-armed Frenchman set it before him, wiped the wood with a dirty cloth, and said with a heavy accent:

"Perhaps the capi-tan would like

to have a table for himself, eh?"

"No!"

Hurriedly the barkeep withdrew, muttering "oui's" under his breath. Norton sipped the fiery stuff slowly, with the air of a man who drinks because he has to. The place was crowded with khaki-clad Yanks and a few French soldiers, all talking at the tops of their voices. The one topic of conversation was, of course, the war. Right beside him, two weather-beaten Yank flyers—from the 195th, down the road about twenty kilos—were guzzling cheap brandy and talking excitedly.

"Cap Weems says he's the top-ranking German. Sixty-one crates."

"Rosenberg. They say he's a flying sonofagun. What does he look like? How can you tell when you run into him?"

"Easiest thing in the world; he flies a white Fokker."

"Lotsa Heinies fly white Fokkers."

"Wait a minute! He flies a white Fokker, see, with his own insignia on the side. It's a big—whadya call 'em—coat of arms, painted on the side of the crate. Blue shield with a lot of funny little things on it, and held up on each side by fancy horses. And right in the middle is a great big red rose."

Norton set down his glass with a thud. Rosenberg! Why, the flying devil he had tackled flew a white Fokker. He remembered, too, that the ship had carried the blue shield and rose just back of the pit. Now he knew what they stood for—Erlich von Rosenberg, tops of the Imperial Flying Corps.

He shoved a franc-note across the bar and walked slowly out. He had some things to think over.

IT WAS early dawn. Down on the line, the Camels of the 42nd burped contentedly, outlined against the red horizon. Norton swigged the final gritty drops of his coffee and lifted his helmet from the

scarred desk. As he buckled it tight under his chin, he wondered if Rosenberg would be back this morning. This time it would be a fight to a finish. He could take no chances of being duped again—not with his entire squadron looking on.

He closed the door carefully behind him and walked down to the tarmac. The engine of his ship was ticking peacefully, and he caressed the sleek fabric of the dumpy Camel. The notches in the barrel caught the early sun and glistened in his eyes. Thirty-eight. Today it had to be thirty-nine.

He gunned the crate and she slid quickly over the tarmac, taking the air with a hefty hop that pulled her skyward. The men followed, keeping the formation close. They droned monotonously across the peaceful Allied territory, and were almost to the Front when a squadron of eight Fokkers suddenly appeared above them.

Again Norton saw a white D-7 flash over him and duck in front of his nose. It was Rosenberg. The Jerry was deliberately giving warning before he struck! He had done the same thing in their first scrap, Norton remembered. He shook his head in pity for a fellow so stupid. You were putting your neck out in such a maneuver, and deliberately passing up a chance to blast an enemy before he could even move. It was hard for Weasel to understand and accept an action like that.

He grabbed at his trips and rolled out a warm-up burst, and the Vickers chattered hungrily. Then he pulled his nose up and snarled skyward, giving the rotary the soup. Already the Fokker formation had broken and the Jerries were ripping back at them. Rosenberg, his white plane contrasting vividly with the dull red of his men's, roared wide open at Norton. Quickly the Yank straightened out and bored straight for the nose of the Heinie, his fingers glued to the trips. The Span-daus joined the rattle of his Vickers, and

a line of deadly holes snaked across the fabric in front of the pit.

But his guns were doing their work. He saw the D-7 shake uncertainly, and then Rosenberg wheeled off in a curving power dive that took him down below the level of the fight. Norton shoved the throttle open with his palm, and the motor shrieked as the Camel spun on a dime and pursued the German ace. Down they roared, the Yank hot on the Jerry's tail.

Like a flash they flattened, Rosenberg nosing upward and swinging right while the wires of the Fokker howled in torture. Norton followed in a motion as quick as reflex action. The Vickers drummed steadily, ripping hot lead into the snowy fabric of the Boche crate. The steely eyes behind the Captain's goggles glinted as he watched the perforations creep from the empennage up to the cockpit. The German was fighting hard to throw him, but the Camel stuck like glue.

Up and around they shrieked, the Vickers pounding ever nearer Rosenberg's hunched shoulders. Then, as tracer all but dug into the pit, Norton's motor quit. Quit dead in the air, almost without a sputter. The Camel, crazy without the surge of the motor, shook dizzily and started to mush. Weasel smacked the throttle savagely, but the rotary was stone dead. He caught the stick and pulled up the nose, flattening into a glide.

He knew that he would not glide for long, for already the white crate of the Jerry had slewed around and was flashing back, flame flecking the Spandaus. Weasel Norton prepared to die—to die as so many men had died under his guns, helplessly.

But Rosenberg suddenly pulled his fingers from the trips, and the hail of hot lead so devastating a moment before stopped altogether. Norton's eyes popped open in surprise. Had something gone wrong with the Jerry's guns? He watched carefully as the Fokker came alongside.

Rosenberg was not even offering to touch the deadly Spandaus. The German waved with one hand, and Norton would have sworn he smiled. Then he pointed to the motor and looked questioningly at the Yank.

Weasel nodded angrily. The German dipped his head, pulled up the nose of the Fokker, and deliberately went skyward. Norton's mouth fell open. And this was the Heinie who had killed sixty men! But he had no time to wonder, for the Camel was rapidly streaking for the ground in a wobbly dive. Camel's weren't made for gliding. Desperately he juggled the throttle, in a last attempt to kick the motor in.

The rotary sputtered. It worked! The engine drummed irregularly for a moment, then caught up the regular powerful pound. He tugged on the stick, and the Camel stood on her nose.

Rosenberg was stuck to the tail of another Camel. As Norton watched, ugly flames licked from the pit and roared around the trapped Yank. Quickly the German dashed in, driving slugs into the pit. The man in the Camel straightened, then slumped to the floor. The crate ripped into a howling spin and shot downward.

In spite of himself, admiration glowed in Norton's eyes. How that Jerry could fly! But, quickly, hard lines replaced the slight, twisted smile, and Weasel shot in. The German wheeled around to flash down at him, but without firing a shot. Norton's hands crept to the trips, then stopped. Let Rosenberg start this.

The Jerry flashed by, waving in something that looked suspiciously like congratulation. Then the Mercedes bellowed as the white crate stood on its nose and ripped down on him. Now lead sang again its deadly song in his ears. Once the engine was drumming, the Jerry ace was only too anxious to resume the fight.

Norton stood the Camel on its nose and

flashed into an Immelmann that brought him back above Rosenberg. Down went the stick, and his hands tore a burst from the Vickers that chiseled into the Fokker empennage. But the German was zooming, and his slugs soon spent themselves in empty air. Now the Spandaus were tearing at him. Something smashed into his instrument panel and showered glass. He fought the stick down, but the streams of tracer dug horribly close to the pit.

Then he realized that the Camel was raking the tree-tops, hedge-hopping crazily. In the heat of the scrap, the Jerry had forced him lower and lower. He hauled savagely back, but the Camel's response was slow. A slug tore into his left shoulder. His brain blew up as the searing pain shot through his chest.

He kept his head long enough to cut the switch. Then the Camel smashed, and oblivion engulfed Weasel Norton.

“GOOD afternoon, Captain Norton,” a voice said, and Weasel looked up, his head whirling. The language was English, thank Heaven! He shook his head and muttered, “Where am I?”

“Where? Twelve kilometers east of Menz—headquarters of *staffel* 171, Imperial German Flying Corps.”

He opened his eyes wider for a better look. Perched on the desk in front of him—he was evidently propped up in a swivel chair—was a boy of about twenty, smiling slightly at him over the barrel of a Luger. His hair was blond, but not cropped in the typical German style. It hung in loose waves over his forehead, which was high and wide.

“What are you doing here? You're English,” Norton asked.

“Afraid not. I speak English—almost perfectly, they tell me. I went to Oxford before the war.” He stood up, clicked his heels, and bowed with Prussian precision. “Count Erlich von Rosenberg—at your service, Captain.”

“Rosenberg! You?”

The youth smiled. War makes men old rapidly. Norton was only four or five years the German's senior, and yet one would think he was twice the age. There were tired wrinkles around Weasel's face, and he looked worn and haggard, but Rosenberg's cheeks were smooth as satin. He stared in amazement.

“You're just a kid,” he murmured.

Rosenberg twisted a smile. “No, old—much older than many of the boys who serve the *Vaterland*.” There was a pause, and then the German spoke, abruptly changing the subject.

“Your shoulder, Captain?”

“Little stiff, that's all.”

“It was a clean wound. The *staffel* Cross man patched it up.”

Norton eyed the boy carefully. “Count, eh? That's pretty much of a title, isn't it?”

Rosenberg's eyes were cold. “Officers are not allowed to speak to prisoners, *Herr* Captain.” In spite of himself, Norton felt like a schoolboy caught red-handed. The German grinned easily and added, “But I don't suppose it makes a lot of difference. They rather give me the run of the German army. Rather imagine a little conversation wouldn't hurt us any.”

He lay the Luger on the desk within easy reach and explained. “You're right. A Count is rather high in the peerage. I inherited it—through a long chain of ancestors. One of my predecessors was with Otto in the first invasion of France in the twelfth century. He was responsible for the coat of arms I have on my plane.”

“Good Lord!” Norton muttered.

“I, my good captain,” Rosenberg smiled, “am the last generation of one of the oldest families in Germany—if that makes any difference.”

“It doesn't make any difference, but it's darn interesting,” Norton said. His eyes wandered to the Luger. Quickly Rosenberg's hand covered it.

“Oh, no! Couldn't allow that. I was

assigned to get you. That's why they sent me here; I couldn't disappoint them."

"Sent you here to get me?"

"Why not? Thirty-eight planes in nineteen weeks. You frighten us, Captain." Rosenberg looked at him curiously. "I rather thought you had me yesterday when my ammunition gave out."

Norton suddenly felt ashamed. He couldn't get at the source of the emotion, but nevertheless the blood rushed to his face when he realized that Rosenberg knew *his* guns had gone sour at that critical moment. He had hoped, somehow, that the German ace hadn't seen him pounding at the breeches, trying to clear the jam. He wanted this man to think that he'd been merciful—that he had knowingly and wittingly spared his life. But Rosenberg *knew*.

"I guess I shouldn't have—" he started uncertainly. "It's a—"

Rosenberg interrupted him.

"Don't feel badly about it, Captain. Heavens, I admire you for it. I just haven't got the—what do you Americans call it—*guts* to take advantage of the breaks. You're a good soldier." He slapped his thigh. "Guess I played a little too much cricket with the Englishmen, before the war. It made a bloody 'sport' out of men."

Weasel sat silent, gazing at the German with mixed feelings. A man who could fly like that—and with a code of honor like that! He shook his head. It was all too complicated. He knew the Jerry was a fool, and yet—

There was a sharp clatter as the Luger hit the floor. In playing with the gun, Rosenberg had dropped it! Quickly Norton shoved back the chair and came to his feet, swinging hard from the shoulder. His right fist smacked squarely on the jaw of the German as he stooped to pick up the gun. Rosenberg staggered, tried to get up his hands. But Norton's hard fist smashed again, and the Jerry crumpled

to the rough floor out like a light.

Norton looked around. The room was deserted. He pocketed the Luger, and glanced sidewise at Rosenberg. He was still out. Norton slipped to the window. Nine Fokkers stood on the line, turning over slowly. It was time for a patrol take-off, and he guessed that the men would be gathered inside the hangar, waiting for final instructions.

He slipped through the open door. A mechanic was fiddling with the nearest ship, but no one else was visible. He took a deep breath and ran for the Fokker.

The mechanic saw him coming and opened his mouth to yell, but it was too late. The Luger barrel descended against his skull with a solid smack. Norton swung into the pit and flashed a glance at the instruments. The Mercedes was warm. He smacked open the throttle and skidded down the runway.

Rosenberg woke up just in time to see the Fokker's wheels lift, and he sprang to the door. Already his men were running toward their ships to begin pursuit.

"No!" he shouted. "Don't follow him!" The men slowed down, looking indecisively at him. "Stay where you are!" Half to himself, he said slowly:

"You're a brave man, Captain." He watched the Fokker disappear, murmuring, half-serious, half-joking, "Happy landings!"

CAPTAIN NORTON pulled on his helmet and looked into the silent faces of his men. They were grouped outside the hangar, immediately behind a line of Camels which chuckled quietly to themselves.

"I want you men," he said gruffly, "to steer clear of a certain white Fokker with a blue coat of arms on the side. That's Rosenberg. He's *my* problem, not yours. If any of you men so much as fire a bullet at him, I'll skin you alive." His voice softened. "His men will probably have

the same instructions about me. Rosenberg and I have an—understanding. He taught me something yesterday. Something I didn't know—”

The men were staring at him, mouths open.

“Shut up, you fools,” he bellowed, although no one had spoken. “It's still your business to kill. Now, get up there and knock down every Heinie you get your sights on!”

In a minute and a half they were in the air, roaring toward Germany. Just as they crossed over the first trenches, a flight of nine planes appeared straight ahead, ducking Allied archies that whanged away below them. One glance and Norton knew it was Rosenberg and his patrol.

There was almost reluctance in his chest as he sighted and flung an experimental short burst that dug into Rosenberg's wing fabric. But this was no time for emotion, for already lead was howling close to his ears. He kicked right rudder hard and swung up and around.

The Fokker was howling down now, the Camel hot on its tail. Rosenberg suddenly straightened and began a steep zoom, with Norton imitating the maneuver a second later. This was what he wanted! He ripped a hard burst that chewed into the nose of the D-7, digging into the throbbing Mercedes.

Rosenberg wheeled the Fokker to the right and up, the Spandaus tattooing a stream that split the fabric right behind

Norton's pit. The stick came back into his lap, and the Camel shot upward as if on strings. Then, with the speed of light, he cut back down. Again the Fokker loomed in his sights, going away. He gave a deliberately long lead and then fired a long burst. Again hot lead chewed into the Mercedes. This time the D-7 shook unsteadily, and the nose dipped as the Mercedes sputtered. Quick to follow up his advantage, Norton flashed down and threw another burst into the limping Fokker's motor. It did the work. The Mercedes sputtered again, choked, and then cut out.

Norton knew it was dead for good. A hard smile came into his face as he pushed the stick down and settled on the tail of the gliding Jerry. Rosenberg twisted around in the pit, smiled over his shoulder, and clasped his hands above his head in a mute message of applause. Then he turned his back and waited for the Weasel to strike.

“Oh, no,” chuckled Norton into the prop wash. “Lord, I couldn't! Smack down a guy who's grandpoppa came to France with Otto in the twelfth century? Never!” He slipped down beside the Fokker and pointed down commandingly. Rosenberg stared at him. Again he pointed down with his gloved hand, then he whirled back up and sighted his guns squarely on the pit, to enforce the demand.

The Fokker flattened into a long glide

In the July-August Issue!

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and started down to the small clearing Norton had indicated, the Camel loafing on its tail. The Yank looked about him, and a brief smile spread across his face. Four hundred feet above, his men and the German pilots were lounging side by side, guns silent, all attention focussed on the struggle below. For a moment all thought of nationalities, of creeds, was gone as they watched with admiration the last great struggle of two great men.

Rosenberg dropped on a small flat spot to one side of the clearing, well behind the Front and out of the way. Norton followed him down, the Vickers always squarely on the German's back. The Camel hit with a bump, and Weasel was out of the pit before the wheels stopped, his heavy Colt in his hand.

"Get 'em up, Rosenberg," he shouted. The German raised his hands. "Now climb out of the crate and step out here."

Rosenberg rose from the pit, slipped to the ground and walked toward him slowly. Norton shoved the Colt into the Jerry's stomach and with the other hand pulled the Luger from his belt. Then, quite deliberately, he threw both revolvers far away into the bush.

"Rosenberg, you're a gentleman. We'll settle this like gentlemen." He ripped off his helmet and goggles. The German stared at him in astonishment.

"You mean—"

"Yesterday, you permitted me to live simply because you were more of a man than I was. Now, I give you the same chance, only your neck isn't at stake." He stared into the open blue eyes, and snapped: "Now put your mitts up!"

"*Ach!*" smiled the German in open admiration. "You should be on my side, my friend! We would be a great pair, we two. But my 'mitts' are up, Captain!"

For answer, Norton swung a vicious right. Rosenberg ducked and came up swinging. A hard fist crunched against

Norton's jaw and he staggered.

Then the right connected—connected with the same solid smash of yesterday in the German's quarters. Rosenberg stopped, shook his head, and got a hard left in the jaw. Again the right flashed and the Jerry's knees turned to rubber. He hit the grass as cold as boiled potatoes.

CAPTAIN NORTON'S men were surprised to see the Camel come limping in a half hour after the rest of the squadron. As the wheels hit, they could see a heavy figure huddled against the fuselage, and when they got to the ship, the Captain vaulted from the pit and said gruffly,

"Let him loose. He's tied to the wires."

Quickly they unfastened Rosenberg and set him on his feet. He had a beautiful black eye.

The next day he was taken to prison camp, with a special letter pleading that the German be well taken care of. Before the lorry left, Norton clapped the German on the shoulder and smiled into the battered but still youthful face.

"Sorry, Count."

"It's all right," Rosenberg rejoined. "You're a good soldier, but you're more than that. You're a man, Captain." He grinned. "You're the finest Yank I ever met."

As the lorry bounced away, he saluted laughingly and called back, "See you when the war's over, Captain."

And Captain Norton felt a strange pang of regret when the smiling face of the blond Teuton disappeared in the dust of the road. After a moment he turned to the men who stood beside him, gazing down the highway.

"He's—he's all right." He grunted and shook his head wonderingly. "Funny what a guy like that does to you, isn't it?"

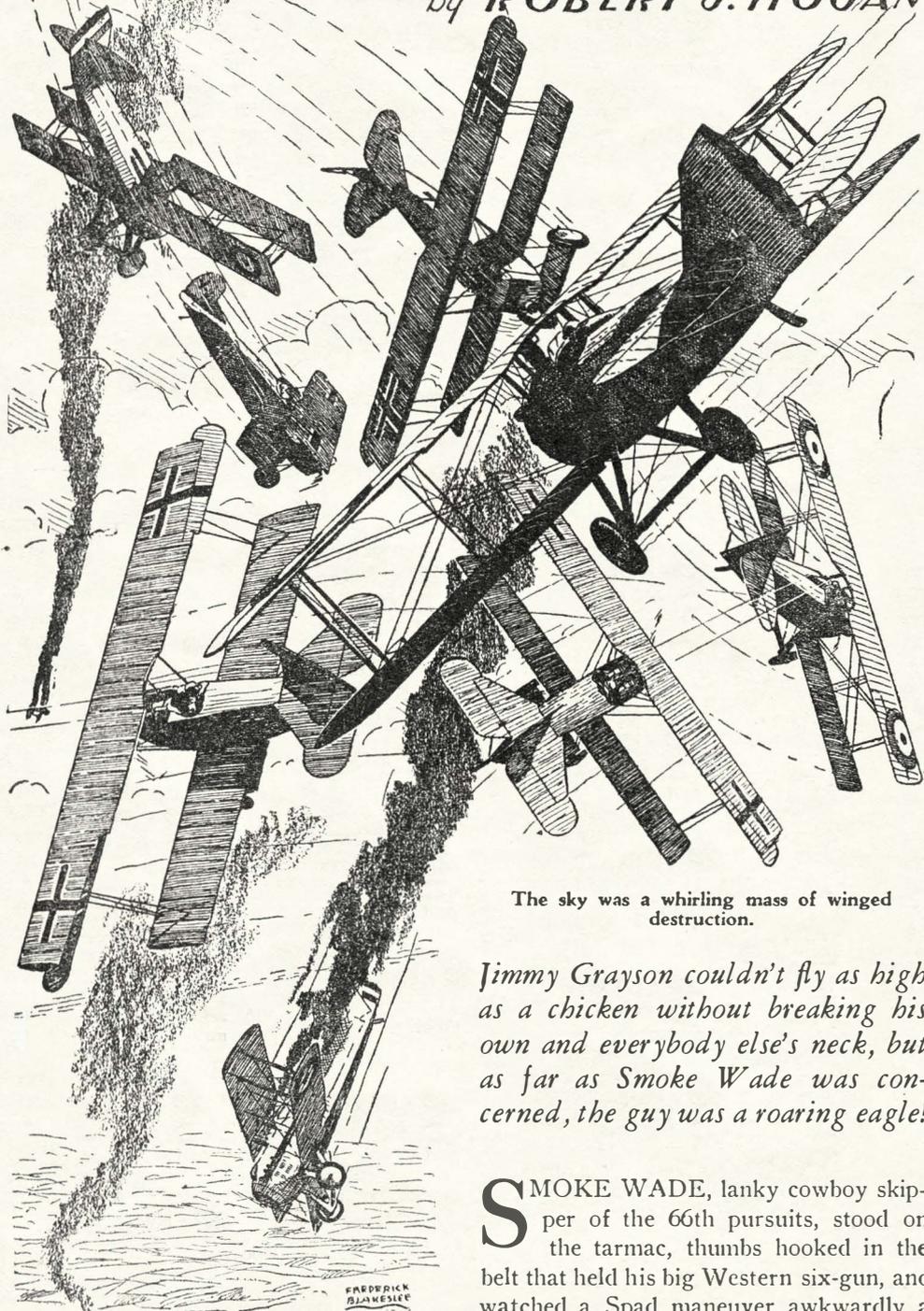
"Yes," some one murmured. "Especially to you, Captain."

They never called him "Weasel" again.

The SKYPUNCHER

A SMOKE WADE YARN BY

by ROBERT J. HOGAN



The sky was a whirling mass of winged destruction.

Jimmy Grayson couldn't fly as high as a chicken without breaking his own and everybody else's neck, but as far as Smoke Wade was concerned, the guy was a roaring eagle!

SMOKE WADE, lanky cowboy skipper of the 66th pursuits, stood on the tarmac, thumbs hooked in the belt that held his big Western six-gun, and watched a Spad maneuver awkwardly a

thousand feet above the eastern boundary.

There was a set expression of displeasure on the leathery countenance of the cowboy ace. The Spad slipped and skidded on the turns and each time it performed an off maneuver, Smoke Wade shook his head slowly in the negative. For nearly ten minutes he stood there watching that plane, then the Spad came in. It dove like a bullet for the field, pulled up sharply, and after considerable struggle, landed in short bounds that all but wrecked the landing gear.

A wiry youngster grinned as he climbed out of the cockpit and strode over toward his commanding officer. Smoke watched him with a troubled expression.

"How was that, Smoke?" the young chap asked hopefully.

Smoke Wade shook his head.

"Jimmy," he said sorrowfully, "it ain't going to work. Good gosh, son, don't you know what you was doing up there? You was breaking just about every rule of flying there is. You didn't make one turn, not even the easy ones, without skidding or slipping. And the way you fly a straight course, anybody would think you were the Chink, 'One Wing Low'. Hell's bells, can't you tell when you're doing those things?"

Jimmy Grayson's smile had fled, but he stared up bravely into his new skipper's face. He opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again. He shook his head sadly.

"No, Smoke, I guess it must be that I can't tell when I'm doing those things," he admitted. "I haven't got the feel of the air or something. Gosh knows I *try* hard enough. You know I wouldn't do those crazy things on purpose."

"Sure I do," Smoke nodded, "and I know you could fly like any other respectable pilot if you could find out what you're doing wrong. But, hell's bells, son, I can't take a chance on letting you go up and get tangled with von Stolz and his hombres. He's leading a bunch of veteran killers

that would cut your heart out and eat it for a grape quicker than you could say 'Patagonia, Arizona'. And how do you think I'd feel, going home after this war's over—that is, if they don't put handles on my fuselage—and facing your mother and dad, with you six feet under the mud of France? Wouldn't I feel swell, knowing that I'd let you go up when you couldn't fly well enough?"

Jimmy Grayson was pleading now:

"Yes, I know, Smoke, but I've worked so hard for this chance. Dad has been so proud of me because I got in your squadron. And mother—well, I know she's proud, too, only she doesn't say much about it."

"Yes, I reckon she is proud." Smoke nodded. "She's got a right to be proud of having a swell guy like you for a son. But she's scared to death that you're going to get killed over here, and after watching you fly this morning. I'm damned sure you would—especially if von Stolz ever got on your tail."

"But can't I stay and practice?" Grayson coaxed. "You can teach me to fly, Smoke. You can do anything."

Smoke Wade grinned at the youngster from his home town and laid his big paw on Grayson's stout shoulder.

"Son," he said, "I think the world of you. That's one reason why I ain't going to let you fly—not until you're ready. But I'm going to tell you something else. I wouldn't fool you for the world, Jimmy. There's some birds what can't never learn to fly. Seems they just ain't got the feel of the air. Understand, son, that ain't nothing against you. It don't mean you're yellow. Why, damn it, you got more guts than you ought to have. You'd go right out there and get killed just to show that you're not afraid! But that's kind of a useless pastime."

"But gee. Smoke, can't I please stay here, attached to your squadron?" Jimmy Grayson begged. "There ought to be

something I could do to help around here. And maybe in the meantime I can learn to fly the way you want me to."

The voice of Colonel McGill, grizzled old Wing commander, bellowed down the tarmac from his headquarters office:

"Smoke! Smoke Wade!"

Smoke turned and waved.

"Come up here! You're wanted on the telephone!" McGill yelled.

"Be right there, Colonel," Smoke yelled back. He turned to Jimmy Grayson in parting. "Now don't take it too hard, son," he said. "You can stay around here at the 66th for a few days anyway, and meantime maybe we can think up something that you'd like better than flying."

"That time will never come," Grayson said soberly. "There isn't anything I'd rather be in than flying, especially with you, Smoke. I've *got* to learn to fly as you think I should."

"Don't count on it, son," Smoke warned. Suddenly his eyes narrowed. "And listen, don't let me catch you swiping a ship without my orders and heading for the Front on your own hook. Now remember that, because I ain't fooling."

"All right, Smoke, I won't go as far as that," Grayson promised.

Smoke Wade strode off toward Wing headquarters, and Colonel McGill pointed to the telephone on his desk. The receiver was off the hook.

"General Banks wants to talk to you, Smoke," he said. "It's mighty important. I wanted you to get it straight for yourself."

THE lanky skipper picked up the receiver and drawled into the mouthpiece, "Howdy, General, how's things today?"

"Bad," General Banks' voice cracked back. "Mighty bad, Smoke. We're up against a tough proposition."

"You mean about the Baron von Stolz and his hombres blowing up all your

good roads to the Front, General?"

"Yes," the general said, "they've blown up all the roads but one. They don't know about that one yet—I hope—or if they do, they haven't tried to blast it yet."

Smoke grinned.

"I reckon that plan I suggested yesterday worked out pretty good, General," he said.

"Yes, I know," Banks admitted. "That advice of yours to forget the other routes and put a camouflaged top on this one remaining road—and move our troops only at night—was mighty good. But that road is the worst of the lot as far as the mud goes. If Von Stolz blasts it within the next twenty-four hours, we're sunk, Smoke. The enemy is preparing for a huge drive, somewhere along the Front opposite us. We've got to have men up there for a gigantic defensive. It's tough enough with only one road, but moving troops up only at night makes it almost impossible. I gave orders this morning to move them during the day, too."

"And I reckon I know what you want us to do," Smoke drawled. "We're supposed to fly above that camouflaged road and keep von Stolz and his hombres away."

"Exactly," the general said.

"H'm," Smoke ventured. "You wouldn't want me to fly over and drop a note to von Stolz with a map showing him just where the road was, would you, General?"

There was a moment's pause at the other end of the line, then the general exploded, "Confound it, certainly not! What are you talking about?"

"Oh, I was just sort of figuring," Smoke drawled on. "You know, you wanted me and the boys to cover the territory over that strip of camouflaged road yesterday. I talked you out of it and von Stolz ain't found it yet. Now you want me to do the same thing today."

"But confound it, Smoke" the general

cried in exasperation, "we can't take a chance of leaving it unguarded. There are several places where the mud is so bad that we've had to cut out from under the camouflage into the fields to keep our trucks from getting bogged down. If German planes come over and see that activity, they'll be back with bombs in no time. You've got to keep all enemy planes away from there."

"I reckon," Smoke drawled, "you're going to be sorry, General. It isn't safe to move troops over that road except at night."

"But I tell you, we can't get enough men up there during the night," the general barked. "We've only got that one road."

"I know," Smoke nodded, "but one road is a damned sight better than none at all, don't you reckon?"

"See here, I'm at the end of my patience," Banks cracked. "Today you're going to follow orders, Smoke. You and your squadron are going to get out and patrol the air above that camouflaged road and you're going to keep every one of von Stolz's devils away."

Smoke's voice came, coldly calm:

"That's final orders, General, I reckon?"

"Right," Banks snapped.

"All right, sir," Smoke finished, "I reckon there ain't nothing more for me to say."

He hung up the phone and nodded to Colonel McGill.

"Better crawl down into your hurricane cellar, Colonel," he said. "There's going to be a lot of hell popping directly, I reckon."

With that, the cowboy ace strode out. In his swinging gait, he marched down to the mess where the pilots were assembled. There was a grave look on his face as he entered.

"Well, gang. I've done all that I can," he said, "but it looks as though the gen-

eral's gone crazy and we got to pay the bill."

He told them of the special orders. Jimmy Grayson's eyes were on his new commander hopefully, but Smoke shook his head.

"This ain't for you, son," he said. "Don't you get mixed up with it."

The cowboy ace bellowed to the mechanics to bring the ships out on the line. He strode over to his pinto Spaul, stopped beside the cockpit, and took out his old Western six-gun. He made a close examination of it to be sure that everything was in readiness for instant action, then he wound his long legs into the cockpit and made a careful check of his controls and Vickers guns. He had named his plane for his pinto pony, back on the Arizona ranges, and now and then he talked to the ship as he had to Jake. He was talking to it now:

"Jake, you and me have got to fly like the devil today. Going to be a lot of good boys killed before that sun goes down. Stick with me, pal, and we'll give them hell."

A few minutes later, at the head of his squadron, Smoke roared out of the field and turned, as the general had ordered, toward the single camouflaged road that led to the Front. At five thousand feet they droned back and forth, but Smoke, even contrary to orders, was careful not to patrol the exact location of the road. He took a course about a mile and a half to the east of it from where he could watch the planes of von Stolz' squadron, off in the distance. Once a two-seater droned across the Front and turned quickly to sweep back. It was met by von Stolz' *staffel*, and they advanced again to the north. Smoke grinned.

"I reckon," he said, "we got them a little bit fooled. They know by their maps that there ain't much directly under where we're patrolling but swamp."

Placing Brant, his senior flight leader,

in charge of half the squadron, Smoke led the other half back to refuel. He found Colonel McGill waiting for him when he landed. The grizzled Wing commander spoke to the cowboy ace as the gas was being poured into the tanks.

"Smoke," he said, "the general is burning up. He's threatening all kinds of things he's going to do to you. He's desperate. He insists upon you patrolling the spot above the road and not to the east of it. He says he'll court martial you, if necessary, for disobeying orders."

Smoke whistled.

"Phew! The old boy is burning up, isn't he?" He shrugged. "O.K., Colonel. I reckon we'll have to give him what he wants." Smoke's gray eyes suddenly narrowed. "But listen here, Colonel," he snapped, "you tell the general for me that I ain't taking no responsibility from now on. You tell him I'm going out there and hold that road if I can, but it's a human impossibility. Von Stolz had got three times the planes and pilots that we have and believe me, every one of them is veteran fliers. They ain't had a replacement in von Stolz's *staffel* for months. That devil gets the pick of the Kaiser's top-flight Heinies."

The mechanic was screwing the cap on the gasoline tank. The other six planes that had come down with Smoke were ready to go. The cowboy ace nodded to Colonel McGill.

"So long, Colonel," he said. "I'd advise you to get down on your knees and pray like the devil for my boys, because they're going to need it."

SMOKE'S boys did need it that afternoon, as the lanky cowboy ace had predicted. While Brant led his half of the squadron back to refuel, von Stolz, seeing from far off the change in the patrol course that the 66th flew, attacked with all possible fury. Smoke sent his pinto Spad racing into that battle and his Vick-

ers guns grew red from rapid firing. One of the guns jammed. Later he was forced to use his six-gun.

But already two of his six Spads had gone down, one in a horrible mass of flames and the other forced to make a landing with a crashed landing gear.

But that was only the beginning of the slaughter. Brant and his Spads came back to reinforce them. Smoke was still working feverishly to clear his one jammed gun, and the Baron von Stolz and his buzzards came back this time with a flight of day bombers. Bravely, Smoke Wade and his boys met them half way to the Front. But von Stolz had already spotted the camouflaged road on his first trip. His planes had plunged about, strafing those trucks which had detoured through the fields without the camouflaged roof to hide them.

Von Stolz and his veterans met the cowboy ace and his few gutsy pilots in furious attack. The air became deafening from the mixed rattle of Spandau guns and Vickers as Spads and Fokkers tore at each other. A Spad went down, then another and another. Vainly, Smoke tried to get down through that tangle of fighting Fokkers to the bombers, but they were already doing their work. The explosions of the eggs that they were laying made the air shudder.

The camouflage of the road was already torn away in many places, and masses of roadbed, men, and trucks were heaved up by the blasting bombs. Moreover, the men down there on that road were powerless to do anything, for in most cases they couldn't see through the camouflaged roof above them to fire at the planes that were utterly destroying them.

The awful carnage was comparatively short-lived. In less than fifteen minutes, the entire road was completely demolished beyond repair. Smoke Wade's pinto Spad and the planes of those loyal pilots who had remained with him were mere seives.

Practically every engine was sputtering and many guns were jammed.

Von Stolz and his bombers turned back, and the cowboy ace and his flight were willing enough to return to their field at Ramou. Fourteen Spads had gone out; now eight were returning. Again Colonel McGill was waiting on the tarmac. He opened his mouth to speak, but Smoke Wade cut him off:

"Go ahead," he said, "tell me General Banks wants to talk to me. Well, I want to talk to him, too. He's lost his only road, now, because of his bone-headedness. The whole damned outfit is blown up. Almost half of my boys are dead. I hope he's satisfied.

A moment later, the cowboy ace was barking similar words over the telephone, but now General Banks had changed his attitude.

"Smoke," he said, "I'm sorry. You were right. I should have known it would come out like this."

Smoke opened his mouth, then licked his lips.

"What am I supposed to do now, General?" he demanded. "There's only eight of us to do the fighting and we only got one of von Stolz' men."

"Smoke," the general confessed, "I'm at the end of my rope. I don't know what to advise. There's only one thing that I can think of. We've enough men and supplies at the Front to repulse one German offensive, but the enemy is apt to begin an attack at dawn along any one of several sectors. If we could learn tonight where their dawn advance will begin, we could shift all our men to that point."

Smoke was feeling pretty sore and couldn't resist a final jibe:

"You wouldn't want me to try and read that in a cup of tea leaves, would you, General? Or maybe you've got an old goldfish bowl I could use for a crystal to gaze into and tell you some things. Why don't you ask Intelligence? It's their job

to ferret out all that sort of stuff."

"I would," the general said, "if there were time."

"Well, the time ain't getting no longer with you thinking over the phone," Smoke told him. "Go on, call up Intelligence and see what they've got to say. I told you what I thought a long time ago, but you didn't do as I suggested." Then, Smoke's voice changed. "I reckon I'm sorry, General," he said. "I didn't mean to rub it into you like that, but it comes pretty hard. I just lost six mighty good boys, and it hurts like hell to know it could have been avoided."

There was a long silence at the other end of the line, then the general said simply, "Thank you, Smoke, for your help so far."

The receiver clicked at the other end.

As Smoke neared the mess, he stopped suddenly. There was the unmistakable sound of his voice coming from inside the hall. First a frown of perplexity mantled the cowboy's visage, then the slightest trace of a smile crossed his leathery face.

"Reckon that's Jimmy Grayson entertaining some of the boys," he said to himself.

He pushed open the door a crack and looked in. Jimmy Grayson was striding up and down the mess, saying, "Men, you'd better take another hitch in your belt, because I reckon there's going to be hell popping directly. The general's just made the biggest blunder of his life and I reckon we got to pay the bill."

Smoke's smile broadened as he opened the door wide and stepped in. The mimicry went on for a couple of more sentences before anyone saw him, then suddenly every eye was upon the cowboy ace. But there was no sign of fear, for those boys knew their skipper, knew that he could take a joke.

Smoke saw that Grayson's expert mimicry had broken the suspense and gloom

that had hung over the group of pilots. With a bellowing laugh, the cowboy ace entered into the fun.

"That's a swell job you just did on me, Jimmy," he said. "Say, you're getting better all the time. I remember when you were just a little kid you could imitate a steer bawling or a rooster crowing; and after your voice changed to a lower tone you could imitate the voice of almost anybody in the town."

Suddenly, Smoke slapped his thigh in recollection and burst out laughing.

"Jimmy, do you remember the time you imitated Lem Custer's wife?"

Jimmy Grayson smiled and nodded and suddenly the voice that came from his lips was that of a nagging old woman, high-pitched and screeching with rage.

Smoke roared again.

"That's great, Jimmy," he said. Turning to the rest of the boys he went on, "Listen, fellows. I've got to let you in on that story. Back in the little town where Jimmy and I lived there's the funniest couple you ever saw. Lem Custer—he's the husband—is a great, big brute that spends most of his time getting liquored up and bragging about being related to General Custer. He's got a wife that's just about as big as a half-pint of cider and she's got a voice on her like a fire siren. Well, you just heard Jim give an imitation of it. One time on Fourth of July we was having a kind of rodeo in town, steer-riding and broncho busting down the main street. Fourth of July out in the cattle country is quite a day, you know. I've seen families drive in their buckboards seventy-five miles and spend two or three days doing it, to come down and see the rodeo. Anyway, this one Fourth of July, Lem Custer was getting so boiled up on liquor that he didn't know whether he was coming or going. He never could see very good or very far when he was plastered, but he sure could hear that screeching voice of his wife.

They lived on a ranch about twenty miles from town. Well, sir, we thought we'd play a trick on him. We stood Jimmy outside the swinging doors of the saloon."

Smoke turned to young Grayson now.

"Go ahead and show the boys what you did and said." It was then that Jimmy Grayson put on the best of his show, mimicking an angry wife with a shrill voice and a wicked tongue demanding to know from the boys outside the saloon where her husband could be found. In a few moments, despite the loss of their comrades, the men of the 66th were doubling over with laughter.

"Well, sir," Smoke exploded, "when Jimmy here stopped, we pushed the swinging doors of the saloon with a bang just like she was coming in. The boys inside were wise, too. Old Lem Custer dived right out of the back door, but he was drunk enough so he couldn't move fast and just sober enough to know that he couldn't keep away from his wife if she ever laid eyes on him. Somehow—we never did find out just how he did it—he got in the big rain barrel at the back of the saloon. Course it was full of water. Well, sir, do you know that by the time we found Lem Custer, he'd damned near drowned in that rain barrel? Never laughed so much in my whole life! I remember the first thing he said when we pulled him out. He was coughing and choking and sputtering, then he lets go with, 'The fellow that invented water ought to be arrested. It's going to be the death of me some day'. And you know, Jim, I've thought about it often since. Anyway, go on, Jimmy. Give us some more of your imitations."

The show went on, and an orderly came to tell Smoke that he was wanted on the telephone. Answering it, Smoke heard General Banks' voice. But this time he wasn't apologizing. There was a note of challenge in his voice.

“SMOKE,” he snapped, “You’ve been pretty wise in the past and you’ve won a lot of money on bets from us. But I’m going to make you a bet that you won’t even *take*, much less win.”

The cowboy ace’s eyes narrowed.

“Go ahead, General,” he said. “I’m listening.”

“I’ll bet you twenty thousand francs to two thousand,” the general cracked out, “that you can’t learn before dawn where the enemy plans to attack. That’s ten to one, Smoke.”

Smoke Wade’s head was spinning a little. A ten to one bet was his meat. It was a bet that he couldn’t turn down.

“It’s a bet, General,” he snapped. “Two thousand francs of my money to twenty thousand of yours that I can’t find out by dawn where the enemy is going to attack.”

“Right,” the general finished.

Smoke banged down the receiver and strode into the mess. He was thinking like mad. He could conceive of only one plan—a desperate one.

“Listen, men,” he said, interrupting Grayson’s show,” something has just come up that means a lot to me. General Banks is betting me ten to one that I can’t find out the enemy plan by dawn. I ain’t turning down no ten to one bet from nobody. I ain’t got much of a plan yet, but this is all I can think of. I’m going to von Stolz’ drome on the pretext of bombing him sky high. When I get over there, I’m going to pretend to have some motor trouble and land at the east end of the tarmac. There ain’t no hangars there, but that’s where the pilots’ quarters and mess is. When von Stolz captures me, I reckon maybe I can get the information out of him, because he’ll think he’s got me cold and he always likes to brag. I don’t know how late they’ll hold me, but I don’t want to wait too long. Let’s say you birds come over loaded with bombs at eleven sharp. You start in and blow up

the hangars. I figure most anybody will be running out of the mess by then. I’m hoping I’ll have a chance to make a break, get to my Spad, and take off aagin. Can I count on you?”

There was a wild cheer from the boys.

“I knew I could,” Smoke nodded. “I’m starting over right now.” He winked at Jimmy Grayson. “I’m going to put on a little show of my own tonight for the baron. It ain’t going to be mimicking somebody, because I ain’t no good at that; but I’m going to take my trick lariat along. Maybe they’d like to see some of my rope stunts. Remember, I’ll be depending on you fellows.”

From there, Smoke went to his hangar and ordered the pinto Spad warmed. Going to his quarters, he brought his lariat, coiled under one arm. With bombs in the racks of his pinto Spad and the motor warmed, he climbed into the air and boldly headed for von Stolz’ airdrome.

There was no moon, but the stars were bright and the cowboy ace could see the various things down below. Flares and guns flashed at the Front but there was no unusual activity there. Later, he sighted von Stolz’s field, tore down in a long dive and let go his bombs one by one. Then he worked the throttle spasmodically and next cut off the gas. He jazzed the motor fitfully as he made a half turn over the field, then started back toward the lines again and let the Hisso go dead.

Smoke noticed something else that added to his satisfaction. Hun pilots and mechanics had come rushing out of their quarters as the first bomb exploded. That would work in perfectly with his plans, later.

He leveled off to land, setting the pinto Spad down by the pilots’ quarters. Already, some of von Stolz’ *staffel* had turned and were running toward the spot where his Spad had slowed. Smoke was climbing out of the ship when a half dozen Lugers were pointed at him. Von

Stolz himself was at the head of his men, grinning with pleasure.

"This is, my dearest enemy, indeed a pleasure," he said. "Of course you realize you are our prisoner."

Smoke grinned, and his narrowed eyes swept across the several guns that were aimed at him.

"I ain't exactly gone crazy," he retorted. "Them guns of yours don't look like the instruments of the home town band sent out to welcome me. This damned Hisso engine sputtered and died on me just as I was about to blow you up."

"And it is good that it happened when it did!" von Stolz snapped. "You have done enough damage already! I hope you try to escape. It would be a pleasure to shoot you as you are."

"Oh, look here, now," Smoke ventured, "that ain't being very hospitable to a friend what dropped in for the evening, Baron. That don't show good breeding, and I reckon you got lots of that." He stood motionless, and the Baron and his pilots waited. "Well," the cowboy ace drawled, "ain't you going to ask me to come in and have a drink? At least you could do that before we go to prison camp."

Von Stolz advanced and ran his flashlight up and down Smoke's uniform.

"It is too bad that you are not dressed in a German uniform," he cracked, "so we could shoot you as a spy."

Suddenly, a dog yelped at von Stolz' feet. Looking down, Smoke saw a half-grown dachschund leaping up and pawing at the baron's legs.

"Lie down, Fritz!" on Stolz ordered.

The puppy ceased his jumping and squatted down.

"Come," the baron snapped at Smoke. "I suppose we will have to tender you the courtesy of an airman." He bowed stiffly. "Will you join us in the mess for a few drinks before you are removed to

prison camp my good friend Wade?"

Smoke chuckled.

"Course I will, Baron," he said. "I don't reckon you'd believe me if I told you that's what I came over for."

AS THEY strode toward the mess, the cowboy ace rambled on, "You know, it's a funny thing, but I love beer, Baron. And it seems that we ain't got no real good beer over there in France. Not half as good as your German beer. I take on a load of it every chance I get."

Steins clicked and the German aces who had caused so much trouble to the 66th squadron drank deeply with Smoke Wade. Meantime, a half hour passed. Smoke was beginning to lead out with questions.

"It kind of looks as though you fellows are going to start a drive tomorrow morning," he ventured.

Baron von Stolz, standing at the head of the table on Smoke's left, nodded.

"*Jawohl*," he admitted, "that's true. We are attacking a point which we think is vulnerable. You can move no more troops to the Front since we destroyed your one remaining road."

"That was a right neat piece of work, Baron," Smoke complimented. "Course, now that I'm your prisoner, I don't reckon you'd mind telling me where the attack is going to start tomorrow."

The baron opened his mouth, then suddenly closed it again and snapped. "*Nein!* Even if I had you in chains, *Herr* Wade, I would not trust you."

The cowboy ace chuckled.

"Don't trust me?" he repeated. "Why, hell's bells, Baron, that's talking ridiculous. Here you got me as your prisoner. I ain't armed or nothing, and everyone of your men's got a Luger. I can't do nothing."

Baron von Stolz sat back, drank his beer, and stroked the silken coat of the little dachschund pup that had crawled

up in his lap. Smoke shrugged and changed the subject.

"Well, it don't matter," he said. "I was just kind of curious, that's all. Course, I wouldn't have no way of telling my own side anyway. Forget it, Baron."

He reached over and stroked the head of the dachshund. The pup rubbed against him affectionately, like an animal realizing that he had found a friend. They drank on. Smoke called the dachshund over to him and the pup willingly leaped up on his lap. But the baron snatched him away.

"There is no telling," he snapped. "You might catch fleas or something from that *verdammnt Amerikaner*."

Smoke chuckled.

"Now come, Baron," he said, "I may be lousy at some things, but I ain't that bad." He raised his eyes to the others about the room. "You know, I've just been wondering if any of you have ever seen the rope tricks they do out in the cattle country in America? I generally carry my lariat around with me—it's out in my plane now—and if you'll send somebody out after it, I reckon I can show you some tricks that you ain't never seen before. You'll find it hanging on the right side of the cockpit, just under the throttle."

The baron watched him suspiciously, but then seemed satisfied. Two of his *leutnants* went out to bring the rope, and Smoke caught a glimpse of his wrist watch out of the corner of his eye. It was a quarter of eleven.

The rope was brought in. Smoke uncoiled it and, standing, began twirling it about him. Next he performed feats such as jumping in and out of the great circle that was spread about the vacant space on the floor. The dachshund barked and leaped about him, trying to catch the rope and jump through it. The cowboy ace showed the Huns other tricks with the rope as time went on.

The evening was passing rapidly, it was exactly three minutes of eleven when he moved his chair out in the center of the room. The baron pushed his chair into a position that would give him a ringside seat.

"Now I'll show you a real trick," Smoke chuckled. "Here's one that they pay big money for on the stage in the United States. I'll bet you never saw anybody set down in a chair and twirl a lariat around him. Watch this one!"

He spun the lariat around and around himself and the chair with the loop growing ever larger. Suddenly, the baron stiffened. At the same time, Smoke heard a droning of planes, and he knew that his boys had come. The roar became deafening.

At the blast of the first bomb, the men of the baron's *staffel* leaped to their feet and rushed out of the mess. The baron himself stood up, but Smoke kept on twirling the rope around and around. Von Stolz whipped his Luger and leveled it at the cowboy ace.

"You *verdammnt* one!" he rasped. "We're alone now, and I'm going to finish you."

The shack was shuddering from the blasts of the bombs. Fritz, the little dachshund, was standing before Smoke Wade, tense and ready to jump at his slightest sign. The cowboy ace made a sucking sound with his lips, and Fritz leaped into his lap and strained to lick his face.

"It would be like you, von Stolz," Smoke said, "to finish me off this way."

The baron cracked out at the dog, "Fritz! Come away from that *verdammnt* one! Come down so I can shoot him."

But the dog showed no intentions of leaving Smoke, and the cowboy ace made no effort to push him away. He knew that the baron was fond of his dog and would hesitate to shoot for fear of hitting him.

Suddenly, that twirling lariat moved like

lightning. The loop lashed up over Smoke and his chair and sped out toward the baron. The loop was growing smaller, and with a quick jerk, Smoke settled it over the hand which held the Luger. He gave a terrific jerk, and the gun exploded, but Smoke had leaped to the side. In the next instant, with the aid of the lariat, Smoke had hurled von Stolz off his feet. He was upon the baron immediately and a moment later had him hog-tied with the lariat.

Slinging the futilely struggling German over his shoulder like a bag of meal, Smoke left the mess by the back door and moved along toward his pinto Spad. Fritz trotted along at his heels, barking excitedly. Smoke stopped and picked the dog up to keep him quiet and carried him under his left arm, the dachschund cuddled close, whining now and then.

A few minutes later, Smoke was beside his pinto Spad. Apparently there had been no fear of his escape, because there was no guard about it. All the men had run down to the other end of the field to man the machine guns, but the bombing raid was about over. Smoke's boys of the 66th were straffing von Stolz's ground crew.

The cowboy ace tied the Baron to the lower wing. He turned the prop and started the Hisso engine, and with the dachschund on his lap, droned out of the field amid a hail of machine gun bullets from the ground guns. The Spads of his boys fell in behind.

PILOTS gathered about him when he landed at Ramou. He untied the baron from the lower wing of his pinto Spad, but left him bound so that he was helpless. He cut the gag from his mouth, now.

"That, my friend," Smoke told him, "is so that you can tell me where the Hun attack will come at dawn."

"You'll never know," the baron rasped.

"No?" Smoke said. "That's what you think. You don't know what I've got planned yet. Come on, some of you birds, we're going to set up a little torturing business here."

The baron set his teeth as they carried him into Smoke's quarters.

"You can torture me, you can kill me, but I will never tell where the attack will be made!" he cried.

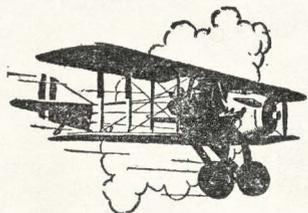
Smoke chuckled. He looked down at von Stolz lying in his own cot.

"Don't worry," he said. "We're not going to torture you, Baron. That's why I brought Fritz along." He stroked the dachschund as he lay asleep on his lap. "He's a cute little fellow, isn't he? I bet it would break your heart to know we were pulling him apart, a leg at a time."

The baron's eyes dilated.

"*Gott im Himmel!*" he cried. "What are you talking about? *Ach du Leiber*, you would not do that to Fritz!"

"No?" Smoke grinned, still petting the dog. "All right, you start talking, then." He turned to Quinn, Snell, Brant and Jimmy Grayson, and his other boys who had come into the room. "Here," he said,



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September Issue On Sale July 30

"take this mutt into the next room. I think we'll start by pulling his claws out. That won't make *him* feel so good, but it will make the baron feel worse."

"You devil!" von Stolz rasped. "You would not dare do this! Torture me all you want to, but do not—"

"Shut up!" the cowboy ace cracked. "I'm running this show now. We're going to get that information out of you if we have to tear that mutt apart limb from limb."

He glanced at his wrist watch.

"I'm going to give you thirty seconds to start talking," he snapped.

He nodded to Brant, who was looking around the corner of the door from the other room, and raised his long right arm.

"All right, Brant," he said, "tell the boys to get their pliers ready. When I lower my arm, they're to start pulling that dog apart and make it snappy."

Then Baron von Stolz struggled to get free. He cursed and spat out threats in German, but Smoke sat there calmly with his right arm upraised, watching the second hand move around on the face of his watch. Suddenly, his arm dropped.

"Go ahead, Baron, and tell us in English," he cracked. "The longer you wait, the more your dog is going to suffer."

There came a wild scream from the other room as though the dachshund puppy was suddenly in terrific pain. Von Stolz struggled furiously to get free, but the more he struggled, the louder were the painful yelps and whines and cries.

"You're just fooling with him!" Smoke yelled. "Pull his tail out of its socket! Come on, some of your birds are strong enough for that! See how he likes that! Let's hear him yell!"

The pitiful yelps increased in volume, and the Baron von Stolz was alternately cursing and pleading. Tears streamed from his eyes, but the yelp of his pup continued to fill the room. Suddenly, von Stolz could bear it no longer.

"Stop! Stop!" he cried.

The baron cursed, gasped out, "All right, I'll tell you! The attack will come at Somiet, a half hour before dawn. God forgive me! Stop! Stop torturing Fritz *Gott im Himmel!*"

Smoke grinned and leisurely stepped to the door of the other room.

"That's better, Baron," he said. Then to his boys inside, "All right, you birds. You can stop pulling that poor dog apart, now."

The cowboy ace returned. He bent down and began untying the lariat that bound the Baron von Stolz.

"God forgive me for turning traitor to my country," von Stolz was choking. "I could not help it; I had to save my dog! *Und* to think that he was given to me by the Crown Prince himself."

"Don't worry," Smoke grinned. "Nobody will tell the Heinies how we found out where the attack is coming off."

He finished untying the last knot and helped von Stolz to his feet.

"Now you can go in to see your dog, Baron," he said.

Von Stolz sprang into the other room, then suddenly he stopped.

"*Ach du Leiber*, he is dead!" he cried. "You have killed him!"

Smoke chuckled.

"No, Baron," he said, "he ain't dead. He's been lying over there in that corner on my flying suit ever since we brought him in. That trip in the plane kind of tuckered the little cuss out, but I reckon you'll find him all together. Matter of fact, we ain't touched him at all."

"You—you what?" the baron demanded.

Smoke and the other boys were all laughing and their eyes shifted toward Jimmy Grayson.

"Nope," the cowboy ace repeated. "We ain't touched your dog. You see, one of our boys—Jimmy Grayson, here—can imitate almost anything under the sun, I

guess. That was him in here, making those sounds like we was half killing your dog."

Von Stolz had snatched up the dachshund pup and was holding him close, as though he didn't believe what the cowboy ace was telling him.

"Hell," Smoke grinned, "you don't really think I'd torture any animal, do you? Why I'm the softest-hearted person there is, when it comes to horses and dogs. In fact, I'm going to grant you a favor, Baron. You're going to be mighty lonesome in prison camp, so I'm going to let you take Fritz along with you to keep you company. I reckon you'll need it."

Smoke started the Baron von Stolz and his dachshund under heavy guard to prison camp. Next, he called General Banks.

"Well, General," he said, "I found out the place of the attack. The Heinies are going to attack at Somiet a half hour before dawn tomorrow morning. You can send over that twenty thousand francs any time you want to. Seems like an awful lot of money to win from just one man."

General Banks chuckled.

"That's wonderful news, Smoke, and fine work," he said. "Don't worry about my losing that money. I was banking on you. I had an idea that you couldn't let a ten to one bet go by, and I was pretty sure that you'd turn heaven and hell

loose to win it. My whole division insisted upon taking up a collection to cover that bet."

Smoke hesitated an instant, then he burst out laughing.

"Hell, General," he said, "tell your boys I was only joking. I wouldn't want to fleece them out of all that money. Tell them we'll all be down as soon as they get back at rest camp—after they've repulsed this Hun attack—and we'll have the biggest binge that was ever put on in the A.E.F. Good luck to you tomorrow, General. We'll be along with our Spads."

He hung up the receiver and noticed that a bunch of the boys were in his headquarters office. He laid a hand on Jimmy Grayson's shoulder.

"Jimmy," he drawled, "you said yesterday that there ought to be something around here that you could do. Well, son, you've done it. You've earned the right to stay with this outfit for the rest of the war if you want to. And I'm going to do my darnedest to help you get the feel of the air so's you can fly with us."

He turned to Brant, his senior flight leader, and grinned as he said, "Brant, reach over on the shelf in the back of my closet there, and pull out them three-dozen bottles of cognac. Anything I hate to see is a bunch of guys with their tongues hanging out."

THE END



DARE-DEVIL ACES

NEXT MONTH—

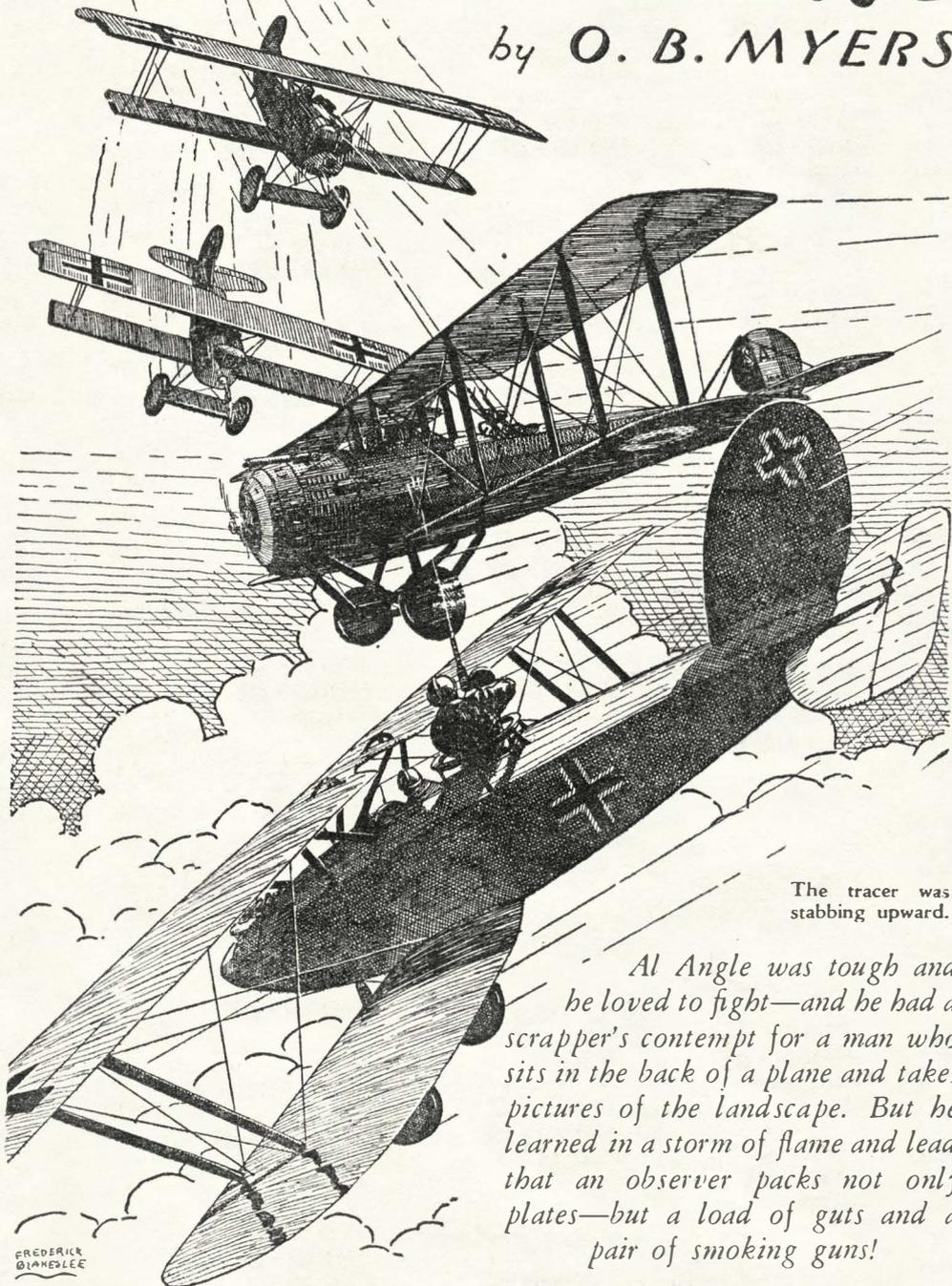
Death came with the rain that covered the Western Front, and it clutched the helpless hearts of the living in its grip of tempered steel! You will meet a man whose wings have been dipped in blood, and whose hatred takes a toll as swift and as terrible as lightning itself! Who is this killer that Jim Clancy must fight; who is this Godless Man of Murder who stalks through the pages of **ACES MUST DIE**, the thrilling sky novel by William O'Sullivan that will appear next month? Also other shorts and features by your favorites, plus a thrilling novel by Orlando Rigoni. All in

October Issue

On Sale August 25

GUTS & GUNS

by O. B. MYERS



The tracer was stabbing upward.

Al Angle was tough and he loved to fight—and he had a scrapper's contempt for a man who sits in the back of a plane and takes pictures of the landscape. But he learned in a storm of flame and lead that an observer packs not only plates—but a load of guts and a pair of smoking guns!

AS SOON as he was outside the door, Al Angle said, "Nuts!"

"Well, we couldn't say, 'No, thanks,' could we?" responded Hummer

Tibbs at his side, trying to keep up with Angle's long strides.

"Aw, these escort patrols give me a pain," snarled the tall man, hunting

through his pockets. "Let's have a cigarette, will you, Hummer? Chaperoning a Salmson around the sky, a few thousand feet off the carpet! How's a guy ever going to bag himself a Boche that way? Might as well go to a clambake with both hands in plaster casts."

"But the 116th Observation—that's the squadron that's been specially assigned to locate the Paris gun, isn't it?"

"What if it is?" sneered Al. "These observation outfits are all the same, a bunch of flop-eared, daze-brained ninnies. If the pilots were any good, had any guts, they wouldn't be on two-seaters—they'd be in pursuit. And as for observers—agh!"

Apparently the mere thought of an observer made him gag.

"Just the same," panted Hummer, "they've got an important job. According to staff bulletins, that long range gun has got more to do with the weakening morale of the French than anything else. Those shells dropping on Paris every half hour, from a distance of seventy or eighty miles; it drives them crazy. Staff wouldn't put a whole squadron on the job of scouring St. Gobain woods unless they were mighty anxious to spot that Big Bertha and mop it up, you know. And if you and I were along when it was spotted, we'd probably get a med—"

"Lemme tell you something," snapped Al, halting abruptly and stabbing Hummer's chest with a bony forefinger. "When that big shell-belcher is located, it won't be by any observer riding in a two-seater. The Boches have got it camouflaged too damned well for that, as any half-wit could guess. Some guy with nerve and plenty of it has got to go into that forest on his own two feet, find out where that overgrown pea-shooter is hidden, and get back out again with the dope under his belt. Don't ask me how! I don't know how; I'm just telling you that's the only way it'll ever be done."

Hummer wagged his head in gloomy agreement.

On the tarmac, a short distance away, stood two Spads, identical except for the numbers on their sides. But when Hummer slid down into the cockpit of the first, he almost disappeared; his eyes, in fact, would have been below the windshield had it not been for the extra cushion under the seat. Al, however, had great difficulty in worming his lanky, muscular frame down into the narrow office of the second.

After a thunderous warming of motors, both pilots waved simultaneously; the chocks were pulled, and the two trimships took the air side by side. As if connected by invisible wires, they climbed together, turned together, and together droned away into the east. And five minutes later they were landing within fifty feet of each other on a large, triangular airdrome next to the Bassecourt highway.

"Major McLane?" said Hummer, saluting jerkily. "Lieutenants Angle and Tibbs, reporting from the 44th for special escort."

"Oh, yes," nodded the worried looking officer who had appeared in the door of headquarters. "The men you're to work with are over here."

As Hummer and Al followed him across the strange tarmac toward a broad-winged Salmson that stood before the hangars, the latter tweaked Hummer's sleeve and hissed, "How's for a cigarette, Hummer?"

A helmeted figure sat in the forward cockpit of the two-seater, fiddling with the controls; he merely turned his head and nodded at the major's curt introduction. From the rear cockpit the observer raised his head; he was very blond, with round blue eyes, pale cheeks, and a smudge of grease on his smooth chin that gave him a boyish, half-frightened expression. He gave them an embarrassed grin, and looked like an urchin caught robbing the

jam closet. Hummer murmured the usual greeting, but Al Angle just frowned at them both.

The major was explaining briefly. For weeks they had been trying to locate the Paris gun in St. Gobain woods by direct observation, but for their pains had gotten nothing but a long list of casualties. The camouflage below was too good for anything to be seen with the naked eye, especially when the observer's attention was being continually distracted by the vicious attacks of enemy planes. They had then tried high altitude photography. This had avoided the hazard of most of the protecting staffels, but had produced no results. On a photograph taken from twenty thousand feet it had been impossible to discover any betraying signs of the cleverly concealed emplacement.

"So now we're going to try low altitude pictures. We've installed in this ship a special camera with a stereoptican lens, adjusted for a focus of one thousand feet. The plates it produces, when viewed through a double-lens magnifier, will show the expression on a man's face as he looks up. So if we only get some decent shots at the wood, and get them back to develop, we ought to have the answer."

Hummer cleared his throat. "Do you mean these fellows are going to mosaic the whole forest of St. Gobain, from a thousand feet?"

"Oh, not the whole forest," replied the major quickly. "Just the center portion. It's a cinch that big gun isn't out near the edge. And they don't have to turn in a fitted mosaic. The orientation of the shots doesn't mean anything, just so long as no large area is omitted. Two trips, from east to west and back again, ought to cover it. Ten minutes will probably be enough for the whole job."

He paused to look keenly at the two pursuit pilots. "We figured that a small patrol would have better success than a big one. More chance of slipping in, grab-

bing the photographs, and dashing out again without attracting the notice of the guarding Boches. That's why I asked your C. O. for only two Spads."

"Don't worry," said Al gruffly. "We'll take care of the Jerries."

The major seemed taken aback by his assurance. "Well, I hope it won't be necessary to fight your way out, eh, Whiteside?"

"Yes, sir, I hope not," agreed the observer.

While he finished up his puttering below the cowl, Al and Hummer withdrew a little way. Al growled under his breath, "Did you hear what he said? He hopes there won't be any fighting!"

"He probably means," pointed out Hummer, "that he hopes they get back with the pictures okay."

But Al only shrugged disdainfully.

After a few minutes the observer climbed down. On the ground he appeared more insignificant than ever; he was as short as Hummer, but not as stocky, and his manner was almost painfully respectful. After they had checked on a map the route to be followed, and the major had gone inside, he asked with a kind of wistful eagerness, "Say, how is it to be flying pursuit, fellows?"

"It's swell," replied Hummer. "Why?"

"I can fly a little, myself," replied Whiteside. "Jake's been giving me some dual. Some day I'm hoping to transfer. In fact, I sent in an application; maybe if we pull off this mission, today—"

Al emitted a snort. "Not a chance, kid," he said harshly. "Pursuit's tough stuff, and there's plenty of he-men coming up already. Your kind better stay here in observation."

Whiteside flushed and bit his lip, but said nothing more.

A FEW minutes later the tiny cavalcade took the air. From its size, and from the scanty fuss attending its departure.

no one would ever have guessed that it was entrusted with one of the most vital objectives of the Allied cause. Major McLane, a few pilots off duty, and a handful of mechanics stood watching. The Salmson took off first, climbed slowly in a wide circle. Then the two Spads, springing off the ground together, rose quickly to either flank of the two-seater, and in a trim triangle they faded into the north.

Al Angle, peering downward over the rim of his cockpit, made a grimace of disgust. These nursemaid missions, as he had declared to Hummer, gave him a pain. In truth, Al was one of those forceful individuals who not only act hard-boiled, but mean it. To him a war was simply an opportunity to fight, and any circumstances that prevented him from roving free and taking his scraps where he found them were annoying obstacles. In this he differed from the military tactics of staff, who held pursuit necessary only in so far as it made possible the other functions of the flying arm. But Al didn't think much of staff, anyway. Perhaps staff didn't think much of Al, either. He surely would have been of no value as an observation pilot, taking photographs, or flying a D. H. bomber. He was merely a rough, tough, hard-flying fool.

The secret of St. Gobain was well guarded from the air. Boche patrols covered that region regularly, and there was a drome just east of the woods where Fokkers and fighting two-seaters waited on alerte and keen eyes watched the skies incessantly. Yet as luck would have it, the little group of three planes actually reached their objectives without even sighting an enemy. The very fact that they flew swiftly, and quite low, caused their approach to go unnoticed until they were over the forest itself. Here the Salmson wheeled westward, and set itself on a steady course; the two Spads no longer clung to its flanks, but wheeled

above it in short, protective circles.

Al stared at the empty sky, first in one direction and then in another, and muttered under his breath. He was not, of course, hoping that the photo ship would fail in its mission, but he certainly would like an opportunity to burn up a little gunpowder before going back across the lines. He was not disappointed.

The Salmson reached the western extremity of the woods, banked, and droned back on a course a mile farther north. It was flying flat and straight; the observer, Al perceived, was getting a beautiful chance to snap his shutter over and over again. The few archie bursts that smudged the blue were not enough to interfere in the least.

It had nearly returned to its starting point when Al heard a faint crackling sound, like bacon grease in a hot skillet. He turned his head quickly; Hummer had let off a volley of tracers to attract his attention. The man in the other Spad was pointing downward, to the right.

Al looked, and his jaw hardened. He saw two Fokkers, climbing as fast as they could climb. Evidently they had taken off from that drome east of the forest to drive away this Allied patrol. But two of them? Al's face creased in a sarcastic smile. Why, he could eat two Fokkers any morning before breakfast.

Without glancing again toward Hummer's Spad, he whipped his own into a slanting dive and roared down on full throttle. His fingers curled caressingly around the trigger grips on his stick, and his eye narrowed in readiness behind his sights.

Perhaps the Boches did not expect him to leap so soon, or more probably they did not expect him to attack at all unless they molested the two-seater he was obviously protecting. Apparently only one of them saw him coming. The Fokker nearest him swerved sharply into a downward curve; Al simply leapfrogged it and charged the

other, eyes glued on the pilot.

The second German pilot must have looked up just as Al's fingers closed on the triggers. He looked straight into the face of death. The Fokker jerked aside like a spurred steed, as the pilot's hand moved convulsively. But then Al's slamming, hissing steel battered his features to a pulp and spattered brains right and left.

His body collapsed limply, and slipped from sight in the cockpit. The stick, released from his nerveless grip, swung forward, and the ship nosed down. In another moment it was hurtling earthward in a vertical dive, the scream of its wires audible for miles.

Al swept through a wingover and looked for Hummer. But to his surprise Hummer had not followed him. Instead of his comrade's Spad, he saw the other Fokker lunging for his tail. A quick zoom dodged that first thrust, and as he banked away he took another and a closer look at the sky in his neighborhood.

He perceived in a sudden, startling moment why Hummer had not followed him in his attack. He himself had seen only those two Fokkers, but that was because he had not taken the time to look for more. The sky thereabouts was boiling with German planes. Some Fokkers, and some two-seater Halberstadt fighters, all tumbling off that guardian drome in frantic haste. Two of them were already spiralling up under the belly of the Salmson, stabbing upward with their searching tracer streaks. And there was Hummer, striving to drive them off.

Al cursed himself for a fool. In his eagerness to get into a scrap he had neglected his duty, which was to protect the photographic bus at all costs. Hard-boiled or no, Al was enough of a soldier to obey orders, and now he started back in haste toward the Salmson.

But he didn't get there immediately. In addition to that Fokker snapping at his

tail, two other Boches cut in between, and for a minute or more he had his hands full. By lightning maneuvers he could keep out of the path of the pursuit ships, which could maneuver no faster than he. But one of those German planes was a Halberstadt, and boasted a swivelled gun in the rear cockpit, and no matter how he ducked and slanted, that gun seemed to be peppering him continually.

Finally he caught one of the Fokkers as it started an Immelmann; he was above, and didn't wait for it to reach his own level. He whipped around on a dime, centered his sights on the spot where it was bound to end that turn, and waited the necessary split second. The Fokker's nose darted across his ring, and he squeezed instantly. His first bullet must have found its target, for before he could even relax his grip to cease firing the German plane was a ball of angry crimson flame.

The other Fokker was for the moment very busy trying to dodge his falling companion and Al turned his attention to the two-seater. It was curving in a gentle bank above him, the observer firing in short, repeated bursts. Al decided that if the fellow hadn't hit him yet, in all those tries, he must be a rotten shot. Besides, he had a great contempt for observers. He wheeled and lunged in straight, full in the face of the volleys from those swivelled Spandaus.

The pilot saw him coming and veered sharply. No doubt that very fact helped to spoil his gunner's aim. The German slugs whipped past Al's wing-tips, while his own wicked tracers sought out the mid-section of the Halberstadt and drilled it through and through. It seemed to stumble, as if its wheels had tripped over some obstruction in mid-air. Then down it plunged, cart-wheeling crazily.

Now Al rushed at top speed toward the Salmson, where Hummer had just sent a Fokker down in flames and was

striving gallantly to handle three more Germans. But he was too late. Whether or not it would have made any difference had he been right there all the time, Al did not know. For the two-seater, curving downward in a glide, did not appear to be seriously crippled. Its prop was still spinning, there were no flames. The controls were not shot away, and the observer was erect in the rear cockpit, though he was doing no firing.

Al tried to watch that glide, which seemed to be directed toward the eastern edge of the forest. But within a few seconds he lost track of the Salmson; there were still too many Boches around, thirsting for his blood. Hummer was tangled in a struggle with two, and two more were buzzing about Al's Spad like blue-bottle flies around a jug of molasses. With both guns thundering he ripped into them.

TEN minutes later the two Yanks had fought their way nearly to the lines, and were still going strong. One Halberstadt had careened down in flames; a Fokker had plummeted with its tail shot clean off. Now Al and Hummer worked a criss-cross on another Fokker that baffled its pilot completely; burst after burst blasted through the black-crossed cockpit, and Hummer's bullets finally made a sieve out of that German's chest and sent him into the last long spin.

Most of the remaining Boches, seeing the Salmson downed and the scene of battle shifted far south, now withdrew abruptly. The Spads suddenly found themselves alone with one Halberstadt and together they leaped on it like cats on a mouse. Their converging bursts rattled through the wings and played along the fuselage; their tracers danced a jig of death on the metal motor cowling.

But that German observer had had enough. He leaned forward to rap his pilot sharply on the back of the head. Then, deserting his guns, he stood up,

raised both hands above his head and waved them in a frantic plea. They could almost hear him shrieking, "Mercy! Mercy!"

For a moment Al hesitated. He had never witnessed an aerial surrender before, and was all for closing out the account with one final handful of bullets. But as he waited, he saw Hummer swoop in close on the German's flank and gesture preemptorily toward the lines. The Boche observer nodded vigorously, spoke to his pilot again, and kept his hands high. The Halberstadt flew straight on into Allied territory. Al dogged its trail, a sneer on his face, half wishing that those Jerries would try to pull a fast one.

But they meant it, and fifteen minutes later were gliding the black-crossed ship intact to a landing on the drome of the 44th. Al and Hummer trailed it in and rolled their Spads, riddled and gashed, up to the hangars. The C. O. met them as they dropped to the ground.

"The photo ship? You bring it back all right?"

"Sorry, major," said Hummer. "It went down in Germany, near the forest. A dozen Jerries jumped us; there's the last one."

"That damned Salmson took a run-out powder," growled Al. "It wasn't hurt at all, as far as I could see. Things just got too hot for those observation birds, and down they ducked. And after getting a cameraful of swell shots, too—the lousy softies!"

"Maybe the pilot was wounded or something," suggested Hummer.

"The crate was flying all right, wasn't it?" demanded Al. "And that tow-headed observer wasn't dead; I could see him moving. No, those guys just couldn't take it!"

The major went inside to call the neighboring field on the phone, and the two pilots walked over to inspect their prize. The captives Al treated with frigid scorn,

even refusing them the customary drink. He could stomach a Boche who fought to the last and was taken prisoner against his will, but these weak-kneed gents revolted him.

The Halberstadt, however, was of great interest to him. It was a bi-place fighter, but was fitted to be used for either reglage or photography, though at present there was no camera in the brackets. Though the fabric of the wings and fuselage was drilled with scores of bullet holes, the motor was in good shape.

And the next morning they took it up together for a joy-ride over the field.

When they landed the C. O. spoke to them gloomily.

"Staff is sore as hell about that flunk yesterday. They had placed great hope in that method of locating the Big Bertha. They've tried everything else, you know. And now they can't even try low photography again with much chance of getting away with it. Of course, the Boches have looked over the Salmson by this time, and found out what it was doing, and they'll be on their guard against the same stunt."

Al flushed uncomfortably. To a certain extent he felt responsible; if he had stayed close to the two-seater, it was barely possible that things might have gone differently, although he honestly felt that the blame rested with the Salmson crew. Nevertheless, the Paris gun weighed heavily on his mind all the rest of that day, but it was late in the afternoon before the idea hit him like a brickbat.

"Look here, Hummer," he said, as they dragged on cigarettes immediately after landing from the four o'clock patrol. "The only way to get pictures of St. Gobain wood that will show up the gun position is to take 'em low down. But according to the major, nobody stands a Chink's chance of getting away with it now. The Boches are set to stampede any Allied plane that looks as if it might be carrying so much as a Number 2 Brownie. Well,

why not try it in a German plane, then?"

Hummer looked at him with gaping jaws.

"No, I'm not losing my mind, you ape. There's a German plane right over there, black crosses and all—big as life. Why not stick a camera in that Halberstadt and take a little trip?"

"Say, that's not bad!" cried Hummer. "Let's go call up the 116th right away, and see what they think of the idea."

Al grabbed his arm. "Wait a minute! I didn't ask you to go telling people. I asked you if you thought it was a sane idea."

"Sure, I think it's a swell idea. The Jerries would never suspect one of their own ships, of course."

"Well, keep it under your hat, then. Why give a good idea to those clucks in the 116th? They'd only botch it up somehow, anyway. That isn't what I meant. What I had in mind was for you and me to stick the camera in and fly the crate ourselves. Then, if it works, we get the credit, which is as it should be."

Hummer stared at him for a moment, but only a moment. No, he wasn't crazy. He was quite serious. What's more, it sounded feasible.

"It's a bet," said Hummer shortly.

The preparations were a little more difficult than had appeared at first glance. Through the skipper, they managed to get hold of a special camera, together with instructions for operating it, without anyone else getting wind of their intentions. But it took them all of the next morning to get it properly mounted and adjusted, and to make a few practice flights over the neighborhood of the field.

"Don't you think we ought to notify the other squadrons in this sector?" asked the C. O. "So you won't be attacked by our own planes?"

"To hell with it," snorted Al. "The news might leak across the lines; Boche intelligence is pretty sharp, I hear. The

fewer that know about it, the better. Don't worry; we can take care of ourselves."

The major, however, insisted on sending an escort of four Spads with them as far as the lines, at least. There they separated, and the Halberstadt, looking from the ground just like any other Halberstadt, droned on into Germany alone on its perilous mission.

Quite soon the forest came into sight ahead and Al spotted the drome near its fringe. It occurred to him that this ship had probably come from that very field, and might be recognized through glasses, so he swerved slightly. As he banked, he noticed a plane standing in an open space just across the road from the drome itself, and even at that distance he knew it immediately for the Salmson.

"So that's where the lubbers landed," he muttered. "They *would* choose a spot where they'd get a prompt welcome."

Bearing westward now, he started to traverse the broad expanse of the forest. Three times he crossed it at an even thousand feet, while Hummer in the cockpit behind him was busy with the camera. Finally the latter leaned forward and rapped Al on the shoulder. When Al turned, Hummer nodded vigorously. He had all the pictures he wanted. With a curt grin Al swung the Halberstadt into a bank toward home.

THE blow fell without warning. The motor had been working beautifully, ticking over with that even, balanced rhythm that every Mercedes boasted. But now it emitted a harsh cough, and a puff of black smoke blew out of the exhausts.

He couldn't discover the trouble; in fact, he never did find out what happened. The engine, which up to that time had been running like a well-oiled watch, coughed spasmodically twice more, back-fired heavily, and then quit cold. The ship began to sink.

Al grated a bitter curse between his teeth. But he knew better than to try to hold any plane level with a dead stick, and quickly tipped the nose downward. He peered anxiously toward the south, but from a thousand feet altitude the lines were beyond reach, and he knew it.

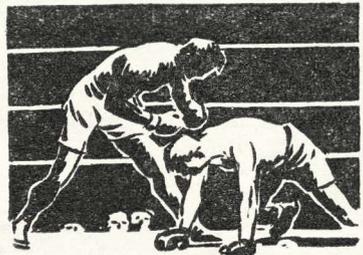
It might have been possible to glide to that German drome, near where the Salmson had done the same thing the day before. But he was damned if he'd copy any observation pilot, and besides, he had an immediate and instinctive desire to be as far as possible from any Germans when he *did* touch the earth. For which reason he chose an empty and apparently smooth meadow near a small stream, but in exactly the opposite direction from those Boches and their hangars.

From a thousand feet the meadow looked good. It wasn't until he was re-dressing twenty feet off the ground that he saw the bumps, and then it was too

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late to change his mind and go elsewhere. He held the stick in his lap and pancaked as slowly as he could. The wheels touched safely the first time, but then the ground fell away sharply in a grassy gulch. The Halberstadt shot over it and smacked into the other side. The undercarriage folded up like cardboard and the tail described a clean somersault over Al's head. There was a sickening *crunch*, and his movements came to an end, upside down.

"How are those plates—busted?" demanded Al, before he even freed himself from his belt and dropped to the ground.

"I—I guess not," stammered Hummer. "The camera's in my lap. Here, grab it while I slide out, will you?"

He dumped himself to the ground, felt of his limbs gingerly, and then helped Al examine the camera. The levers were bent, and the shutter seemed to be jammed, but the plates in their case were intact. They were bent over examining it when the shrill sound of a whistle came to their ears.

"Say, there must be troops near here," exclaimed Hummer. "That sounds like a non-com's whistle. Here's where we get grabbed."

"Like hell," retorted Al. "Pull out that frame of plates and stick it under your coat. Ditch the rest of it, and come on."

He led the way at a fast trot toward a nearby clump of trees. They ploughed through the underbrush, splashed across the little creek, then climbed a steep bank on the other side. There they turned to look back. They had started none too soon, for a squad of soldiers in field-gray was approaching the Halberstadt at the double.

"They'll be mighty curious about what happened to the passengers," muttered Al. "We'd better get the hell out of this neighborhood."

Taking turns carrying the heavy case of plates, they pressed on across country. They avoided buildings, even those that

looked unoccupied, but had to cross roads twice. When they finally came to the limit of the wooded region, Hummer suggested a halt.

"That last road we crossed, we almost got spotted by that car. The country ahead looks pretty open for us to be chasing around in broad daylight. How's for laying up here till dark?"

Al admitted the advice was good, but insisted on climbing into the thickest foliage of a huge oak before he felt safe from discovery. Here they spent the few hours until dusk laying plans.

"We've got the pictures," Al pointed out. "All we've got to do now is get them back. On foot it will be tough work and risky, for the plates as well as for us, even if we only travel at night. Slow, too. Our best chance is to lay hands on a plane. But these Boche planes, they don't seem to like me. Look at the way that blasted Halberstadt quit, damn it! I only savvy American ships. I wish—"

"That's it!" cried Hummer, his face brightening. "The Salmson!"

"What do you mean, the Salmson?" demanded Al, puzzled.

"The one that went down day before yesterday! You said it didn't seem to be damaged much. Maybe the Jerries have fixed it up by this time. That field where it's standing, next to the drome, is due north of here, and it can't be very far. That brook we crossed runs right past it; if we go back, and follow the stream, we can't miss it."

It sounded easy, but it was harder to carry out. The pitch darkness of a moonless night, which was all that protected them from capture, likewise made travel difficult, especially when they dared not follow a road but had to trace the winding course of the creek. Once they left it on a short cut, got lost, and had a lot of trouble finding it again. Once Hummer slipped into a deep hole and lost his grip on the plates as he floundered. It took

them half an hour of frantic diving in the cold and inky water to recover the case.

It was nearly midnight when they peered through a screen of bushes across a rolling flat. Beyond it was a road, and on the other side of the road was the German drome. They could see the humped roofs of the hangars against the murky sky, and one or two squares of light, very faint, where candles burned in a barracks or an office. They could also hear, to their dismay, the low voices of sentries.

"Is that the ship, over in the corner?" whispered Hummer.

Al gripped his wrist, hard. "If there's a sentry by it, we'd better see him before he sees us."

"If there is, what'll we do?"

Al did not reply. Instead he crept out in the open, but circled so as to keep close to the fringe of trees. Hummer followed a pace or two behind. In cautious silence they slipped noiselessly along.

Al was within thirty feet of the silent Salmson before he saw to his horror that there was a guard posted there. The dim glow of a pipe showed where he crouched under a wing-tip. Al pushed Hummer down to the ground and motioned him to remain where he was. Then Al crept on, step by silent step, like a tiger stalking his prey.

He was six feet away before he sprang. His fingers closed at once on a wind-pipe and he could feel the bristle of a short beard. His intention was simply to silence the fellow, then bind and gag him. But the German fought furiously, squirming and kicking, and struggled madly to yell, and before Al finally choked him into submission, Hummer scrambled near and bounced a rock off his close-shaven head. After that the unlucky Boche lay very still, for he was dead.

Al rose, wiping blood from his fingers. The sweat stood cold on his brow; he had never helped kill a man with his bare hands before.

"Let's get out of here," he croaked huskily.

But Hummer was already slipping the case of plates in the rear cockpit, and starting to inspect the ship as well as he could in the utter darkness. After a few minutes he came close to Al's side.

"She looks okay," he hissed. "Can't tell about the motor. Let's try to start her, anyway. You get in and set the throttle."

Al clambered stealthily into the forward cockpit and felt for the switch. Hummer went round in front and began to swing the prop. The hiss of gas being sucked into the cylinders seemed to him as loud as a screaming gale and he could not understand why it was not heard across the road. He kept his eyes turned in that direction, squinting into the blackness, but could see no sign of movement.

"Contact," murmured Hummer.

Al flicked the switch and replied. The prop creaked softly as Hummer threw it over. There was no other sound.

"Better prime her some more," muttered Hummer after a moment.

Three, four, five times this operation was repeated. Not once did the motor show the least sign of life, though the radial engines with which Salmsons were equipped were reputed to be easy starters.

After a while, Hummer came round by the cockpit. He was panting.

"Damn her," he mumbled. "In daylight I might be able to find what's wrong. But in the dark I don't even know where to look. What—"

Al grabbed his arm suddenly. "Sh-h!" he hissed.

He had been wondering how soon a relief would be showing up for that sentry. Now he was sure he saw a vague figure crossing the road. Hastily he eased out of the cockpit and dropped to the ground. Both he and Hummer backed in under the fuselage staring into the night, waiting tensely.

A MAN was approaching, that was certain. But his actions were peculiar. Instead of coming directly toward the Salmson, he neared it by a circuitous route, stopping frequently, and apparently trying to be as quiet as possible. At last, making not a sound in the damp grass, he slipped up toward the fuselage and came to an abrupt halt.

Al, crouched tense and quivering, was still filled with repugnance from his last killing and had no wish to repeat it unless it was absolutely necessary. But he saw, to his horror, that the newcomer had stumbled over the corpse of the sentry. That spilled the beans, he knew. In another moment the alarm would be raised. Gritting his teeth, he leaped out, clawed hands clutching for the man's throat.

Hummer sprang with him; together they bore the stranger to earth. Like animals the three of them scrambled in the grass, each striving to make as little noise as possible and to kill or silence the other as quickly as it could be done. Al could make out nothing of his antagonist, except that he was small and fought even more fiercely than the first. He got a grip on the windpipe, but when a knee caught him in the groin his muscles all went limp and his clutch slipped.

Expecting to hear a raucous shriek for help, he was amazed to hear only a hoarse whisper. "Ah—damn it all!"

Hummer, who had thrown himself bodily on the stranger's head, panted in surprise, "What was that he said, Al?"

Muffled gasps came from under his armpit. "Hey—I'm no Boche!"

Hummer rolled aside and peered closely at that face.

"My God! It's Whiteside!" he exclaimed in astonishment.

The little observer sat up and rubbed his head.

"Oh, it is, eh?" grunted Al. The pain of that kick in the belly made him mad clear through. "A fine toad you are!"

"Listen," said the observer, who sensed the reason for the scorn in Al's tone. "I couldn't help going down, the other day. My pilot was killed, and both my guns were jammed by bullets. And more bullets had smashed the camera, plates and all, so what was the use? I landed the ship here all right, but they didn't capture me. I had a hunch I might be able to get back to it, so I took the timer cap off the magnet; I've got it here. Maybe we can start her, if—"

He came to an abrupt halt as a voice called from across the road, and a flashlight winked. Evidently the noise of their last set-to had been heard, and a sentry was challenging. There was no time to lose. Hummer sprang for the prop and Al wiggled himself down into the pilot's cockpit. The observer reached in under the cowl, to fumble with something in the darkness. Then, "Okay!" he croaked.

The motor started after one turn, being already well primed. With the first belch of the exhausts, lights sprang up on the other side of the road, voices shouted loudly, and rifles cracked. Al heard the whine of bullets about his ears as he nursed the throttle gently, fearful of stalling the engine if he opened up too quickly.

But figures with flashlights were running toward him and the bullets grew thicker; he had to take a chance. Under the same circumstances a Hiss would have choked and died, but the Salmson responded gallantly. The ship began to roll over the uneven ground, bouncing perilously, for what seemed like an interminable time. But at last, when Al began to see a horizon of tree-tops dangerously close ahead of him, the bouncing stopped. Slowly, very slowly, the Salmson rose off the earth into the curtain of night. It had not gone a quarter of a mile before a searchlight blinked on, caught it.

That trip was literally a nightmare. For years afterward Al would dream of it

and wake up in a cold sweat, muttering curses. No sooner did he fly out of one glaring beam than another searchlight picked him up. With three men aboard, the ship would not climb high, and the archie gunners made merry with the easy target. Night pursuit gathered to the light beams like bees to honey, and the air resounded with the thunder of exhausts and the slamming of machine guns.

Al, half blinded and deafened, struggling to hold a course, did not realize where all the firing was coming from until he turned his head. Hummer was crouched low in the rear cockpit, his body curled around to shield the precious plates. But Whiteside, the scrawny little observer, was braced against the guns, his face livid, his lips curled back in a savage snarl. The Boche must have fixed the jam! The barrels of those guns were cherry red, and their muzzles belched silvery streaks faster than the eye could count. He could aim, too, by God; a Fokker lit up the whole sky to a lurid crimson as it tumbled in flames before his well directed volleys.

Al was not certain just when he passed the lines. But after a while the searchlights began letting him alone, after a brief inspection, and centered on his assailants. And archie bursts, when he could see them, were white instead of black. Soon even these ceased, and he was droning along through the grayish murk alone.

He circled the field once cautiously, and saw a flashlight appear in front of headquarters. Then he set the wheels down and rolled the Salmson right up to the door. The moment he cut the switch he heard Whiteside's anxious voice behind him.

"You'll have to lend me a hand here, I guess."

Hummer was pale as a ghost in the light of the flash, his head lolling groggily, but his eyes open. They lifted him gently.

"It's only my legs," he murmured. "But the plates—I'm afraid—"

With cold hands Al hunted feverishly in the rear cockpit. Yes, by God, Hummer was right! When he hoisted the case out in the light, he could see the two neat holes right in the middle, and it gave out a glassy tinkle as he shook it.

"What plates are those?" asked Whiteside curiously.

Al could not find the voice to tell him.

"Well, it makes no difference," shrugged the observer. "We got back all right, didn't we. So now we're all set."

Al glared weakly, but still could not speak.

"Maybe I'd better finish what I started to explain," continued Whiteside, wiping a trickle of blood from his cheek. "After I parked the ship in Germany, I saw that the pictures weren't going to be of much help. So I buzzed around on foot for a couple of nights, in St. Gobain wood. I got close enough to see the Paris gun, right in its concrete emplacement, and the location is pretty clear in my mind. Close enough for the artillery to go to work on it, I guess."

At last Al conquered his paralyzed tongue.

"You mean—you're telling me you found the gun? Went in there on foot and saw it? You know where it is?"

The observer, lighting a cigarette, nodded as casually as if his feat were an everyday occurrence. Al turned suddenly to the C. O.

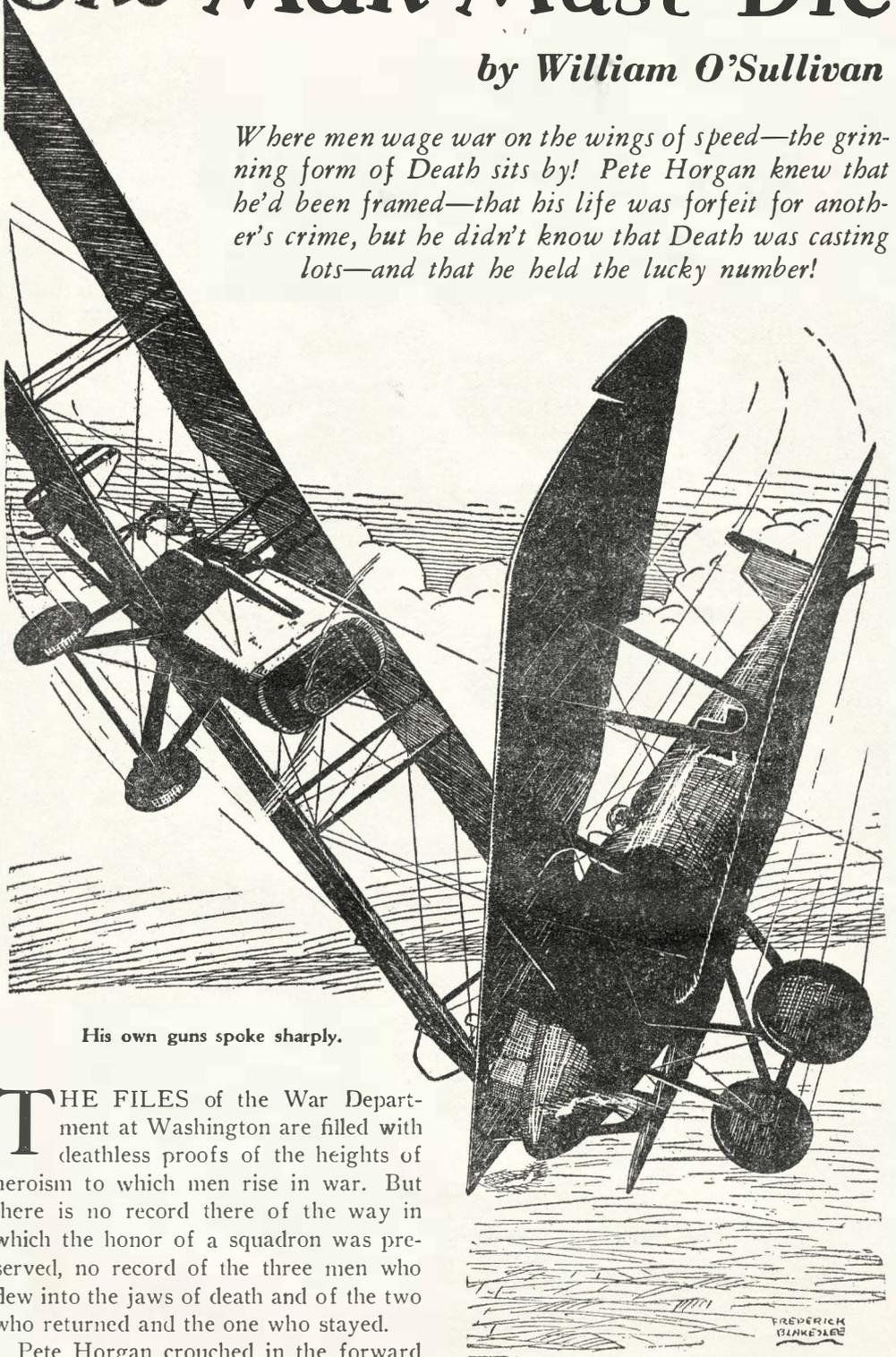
"Look here, major. Hummer is going to be laid up for a bit, it seems. Anyway, we're always needing replacements, aren't we? Well, here's a guy looking for a transfer, and you'd better grab him quick. Maybe he used to be just an observer, but I can tell you he's the damndest—he's, well, he's—major. *he can fight!*"

And that, coming from Al, seemed to settle the question.

One Man Must Die

by William O'Sullivan

Where men wage war on the wings of speed—the grinning form of Death sits by! Pete Horgan knew that he'd been framed—that his life was forfeit for another's crime, but he didn't know that Death was casting lots—and that he held the lucky number!



His own guns spoke sharply.

THE FILES of the War Department at Washington are filled with deathless proofs of the heights of heroism to which men rise in war. But there is no record there of the way in which the honor of a squadron was preserved, no record of the three men who flew into the jaws of death and of the two who returned and the one who stayed.

Pete Horgan crouched in the forward

pit of the whirling De Haviland, slitted eyes following the gyrating evolutions of the green and white Pflaz. The realization came to him that this was no ordinary fight. Far behind the American lines though they were, he knew that this Hun had no intention of turning back until the end came, one way or the other. Dusk was settling and the sky was strangely clear of other aircraft. There was one the day bomber, its broad wings sagging wearily, and the vengeful Pflaz fighter which had harried it all the way back across the lines.

Horgan thumbed the stick trigger as the ringsights caught a momentary flash of Maltese crosses. He whirled the D. H. heavily upon one wing, knowing that to lose sight of the Pflaz meant death. Once the German placed himself behind or below, the two-seater was doomed. For in the rear cockpit the Yank observer hung limply from his belt, his chest a pulpy mass. With the Lewis silent, only the forward Vickers and Pete Horgan stood between the Hun and victory. And all the strength and fighting fury was flowing from Horgan as the blood dripped from his punctured left arm.

With failing strength he flung the heavy two-seater into a roll, came out of it with both guns chattering. The onrushing Pflaz fired two brief bursts, then ruddered hastily aside. In that moment of life and death it was curious that Horgan should think of Billy Hart—the kid he had babied through the first few weeks of front-line duty. Horgan wondered swiftly if the iron of manhood would ever show in the kid, and with the thought, his exhausted body jerked erect.

A second ship had appeared behind the Pflaz, another D. H. Horgan caught one glimpse of its numerals in the closing dusk. Speak of the devil—here was Hart himself! The newcomer's Vickers flamed in a long burst, and Horgan saw the tracer stream ripping yards wide of the Pflaz.

Hart never could shoot, but the interruption served to distract the Pflaz from Horgan's crippled ship. The German whirled savagely on Hart, and Horgan frowned as he saw the kid wheel frantically aside in panicky haste.

A surge of fury spurred Horgan on, and he flung the D. H. viciously about. It happened so swiftly that a heartbeat would have spanned the action. Lead from Horgan's Vickers stabbed up, transfixed the Pflaz' vitals. The motor stammered to a stop, and the prop flailed to a standstill. The Pflaz went gliding down through the clouds.

Horgan followed, with Hart close behind. Below the clouds he picked up the falling Pflaz but made no effort to fire. They were in American territory, and if the Hun could land without crashing, a ship and prisoner would be much better than a mass of charred wreckage.

With a start Horgan realized that they were even farther behind the lines than he had thought. He picked up landmarks in the failing light and realized that the 52nd's own drome was the nearest available landing field. He cut down beside the gliding Hun and gestured imperatively. The German nodded, changed the direction of his glide, and a broad field loomed suddenly below. The Pflaz came in perfectly and glided to a halt, and Horgan saw the pilot snatch something from the pit even as he swung to the ground. But before the Pflaz could be fired, ground guards were swarming over the pilot. Horgan slanted in for his own landing, with the ship of Billy Hart close behind him.

Horgan stepped over to the group around the German. He saw a thin-faced, dark man; a man whose eyes were yellowish and crafty.

The German came swiftly to attention. He bowed mockingly. "Major Herman Jorn," he said stiffly. "I seem to be your prisoner."

"Seem is right," Horgan said dryly. "Lock him up, sergeant!"

The group moved off, with Jorn in its center, and Horgan saw the C. O. come from his office and start across the field. The Major flung one quick glance at Jorn, then came up to Horgan and Hart.

Old Stone Face, they called Major Moran. He had a cold gray block of a face and granite eyes that carried the piercing power of a blue flame. It was said that no one had ever seen Old Stone Face smile, and Horgan could believe that. The man was all iron and rock, all cold efficiency. He sent men out to die and listened unemotionally to the news of their death. Moran was, to the pilots and observers of the 52nd, an automaton, and in the nine months that Horgan had served under him, he had never once seen a hint of human emotion.

"What happened, lieutenant?" he asked coldly.

Horgan explained, but made one alteration to the story. Impulsively he lied, with the hope that official recognition might inject a confidence into Billy Hart that the kid had so far lacked.

"Hart crippled the Pfalz," Horgan said quietly. "Lorenz was dead, and I was all washed up when Hart showed up. He downed Jorn, Major."

"That's a lie!" Both men whirled as Hart's sharp voice blared. The youngster's face was white, and stark terror shone in his eyes. "That isn't true, Major! Horgan shot Jorn down, he knows he did. The only bursts I fired were yards wide!"

Old Stone Face shrugged. "It doesn't matter. The thing is done. I'll have to notify H. Q. They'll probably come for Jorn in the morning. The Intelligence division has been anxious to get hold of a German pilot for questioning. Both you men make out your reports immediately."

Horgan swayed suddenly, once more aware of the wound he had forgotten in the excitement. "As soon as I get this

arm fixed," he said thickly, and sagged.

Moran stared at him impersonally. "Hurry, then," he snapped callously. "Those reports should go out tonight."

ALL THE while the M. O. was dressing the pierced arm, Horgan was thinking curiously of Billy Hart's white face. Why had he been so terrified? What was this German to him? Once before Horgan had given him credit for an unearned victory, and the kid had made no bones about accepting that. Curious, too, why Old Stone Face put up with so much from Hart. Moran had a reputation of being hardboiled with rookies, yet he had twice overlooked actions of Hart that smacked almost of cowardice.

The Spandau slug had missed the bone of Horgan's arm, and after the M. O. had finished, save for a feeling of weakness due to blood loss, the 52nd's senior flight leader felt his normal self. A stiff drink helped the feeling of lassitude. Horgan finished his report and headed for the mess building.

Major Jorn was brought into the room for mess, and in accordance with Air Service tradition was entertained for an hour or two later. Late in the evening he was returned to the guardroom and locked up for the night. The little building was solidly built, and the only opening were covered by heavy steel bars. Since escape was impossible, no sentries were left.

Horgan fell asleep, to be haunted by troubled dreams in which the terrified face of Billy Hart and the ruthless features of Major Moran moved like evil spirits. Sometime later he came tensely erect on his cot. For a moment his drugged brain struggled to understand the sound that had awakened him, then abruptly he realized what it had been. A shot! And from the direction of the guardhouse!

Horgan had fallen on the bunk fully dressed, and now he leaped through the flap of the Nissen and raced toward the

guardroom. The distance was short, and even as excited cries rang over the field, Horgan was at the door of the building, peering inside. A slanting shaft of moonlight crept through the bars and Horgan jerked in swift horror.

Major Herman Jorn was stretched on the floor, and a dark flood was oozing from a round black hole in his forehead! Murder!

Even as Horgan became aware of what had happened, he realized that running footsteps were converging upon the spot. He started to shout, then broke off abruptly as a dark shadow seemed to materialize from the ground and leap upon him.

Instinctively Horgan tried to defend himself, to grapple with that shadow. But the attack was too swift and unexpected. A sharp blow landed on his skull, sending him to his knees. He was vaguely aware that something had been thrust into his hand. His left hand, groping weakly for his assailant, brushed across a lieutenant's shoulder bar then slid down across silver wings on the tunic. Then the attacker was gone like a wraith, and Horgan was struggling dizzily to his feet.

Boots pounded beside him, and through a swirl of pain Horgan saw the face of Major Moran, and beside him was flight leader Mattick. Moran lunged to the cell window, took in the grim tableau inside with a single glance. Then he whirled, a curse growling in his throat. For the first time Horgan was aware that a .45 automatic was dangling from his own hand. Old Stone Face jerked the weapon away, slid back the breech slide.

"One shot fired," he rasped grimly.

The next moment curious pilots and field men charged in from all sides. Moran stepped quickly forward. "Back to your quarters, every one of you!" he roared. "There's nothing wrong! Just an accidental shot. Go on, clear out of here!"

The group melted away, muttering. "Into my office," Moran ordered curtly.

Mattick followed Horgan as they crossed the corner of the field. A single thought was chasing through Horgan's churning brain. Hart! He could have sworn that the man who jumped him a moment before had been Billy Hart! He remembered the stricken look that the kid had worn earlier in the evening, when the identity of the German had been revealed.

Old Stone Face lighted a lamp, and sat down stiffly behind the desk. Mattick hovered nearby, a malicious grin on his face. Horgan knew Mattick had hated him for months, ever since he had been made second in command over Mattick's head.

"Maybe you don't realize it, Lieutenant, but this is murder," Moran said harshly. "It doesn't matter that Jorn was a German. He was an unarmed prisoner. Headquarters is going to call it murder, and the man who did it will get a death penalty!"

"Why did you kill him, Horgan?" Mattick asked suddenly.

Horgan laughed harshly. "It just happens that I didn't kill him."

He told what had happened, omitting his belief that Hart had been involved.

He knew instantly that neither listener believed him. Looking at it coolly, he could see that an overwhelming weight of circumstantial evidence was against him. He knew too that Moran was right—a court would consider the crime murder, regardless of the fact that Jorn was a German.

"Well, Horgan burst out savagely. "If that's the way you feel about it, why don't you notify Headquarters?"

"I was thinking," Old Stone Face said slowly. "I was thinking of the squadron. H. Q. would raise hell—they wanted to question this Hun, aside from the other angles. But a court—don't you see what that would do to the squadron record? A damned black mark on the 52nd! An outfit where helpless prisoners are murdered! The Boche would be sure to get wind of it.

That would mean reprisals. No, I don't think I'll notify H. Q.!"

"But you can't let this killer go scot-free!" Mattick interrupted angrily. "I shall consider it my duty—"

"The chance you've been waiting for!" Horgan jeered. "You'd be senior flight leader if I was out of the way. You'd be ranking squadron ace!"

"Never mind Mattick," Moran growled. "We both know him. I'm thinking of the squadron. Horgan, and I wonder if it means anything to you. I'm thinking of a way that'll square accounts, that'll hush the thing up, and shut Mattick's mouth as well!"

Horgan saw a fanatical gleam flare in Old Stone Face's eyes. "Which would you prefer, Horgan—a chance to put this outfit on the map, a chance to hit the Huns hard and leave your name clear—or would you rather be dragged through the mud of a court-martial, and the 52nd with you? A court that could only result in a death verdict?"

"I'm waiting for your proposition," Horgan said softly. He felt sure of what was coming. Moran's hand shook on the desk.

"There's a job," he husked. "A job that H. Q. has hesitated about, because it's a suicide detail. That area of fuel tanks east of Chevilly. . . . If they could be blown up—!"

Swift, bitter thoughts raced through Horgan's brain. He visioned himself in the court, facing a hard-eyed ring of general officers. He knew how that court would result, and he knew what it would do to the 52nd.

Talking wouldn't do him any good. Billy Hart could clear him—if he would.

"I'd like to speak to Lieutenant Hart before I answer," Horgan rasped.

Mattick went out, to reappear a moment later with Hart. The kid's face was chalky, his eyes shifty. "They're accusing me of murdering Jorn," Horgan said

evenly. "I've saved your hide once or twice. Got anything to say, kid?"

Hart's eyes flashed desperately around the room. "Say to you?" he mumbled. "Why—no! Why should I?"

Horgan's open palm smashed against Hart's cheek. "You've shown me a thing or two, kid. Okay, Major, I'm ready for Chevilly!"

Relief flamed in Old Stone Face's eyes. "That's settled, then. This wipes the slate clear, Horgan, if you go through. And it'll have to be tonight. I'll cover up here, until dawn. Mattick, you and Hart understand this is the end! You'll keep your mouths shut!"

"If Horgan pulls this job, and doesn't come back, justice will be served," Mattick said smugly. "I'll keep quiet."

Billy Hart had stumbled from the room. Moran waved Horgan to follow, and turned toward the hangars. "Your own crate is badly shot up; take Hart's. Better take off immediately, too."

A few minutes later Horgan stood beside a warming D. H. Underneath, two huge bombs nestled in the rack.

"Just one thing before I go," Horgan said quietly. "I want you to know, Major, that you're a damned, stone-hearted butcher! I'm not doing this for you, but for the outfit. I didn't kill Jorn, and I hope you find that out, someday. Then if you *have* got a soul, it'll burn in hell as long as you live!"

Then he was in the pit, jamming the throttle open. The D. H. rolled along and lunged heavily into the air. Horgan turned toward the lines, his face an iron mask of resolution.

HE KNEW well enough that he wouldn't be coming back. The concentration of fuel tanks beyond Chevilly was the most strongly guarded spot along the Front. He thought of the massed batteries of anti-aircraft that surrounded the place; of the swarms of pursuit ships

that were within instant call. Moran had been right; the only man who stood a chance of succeeding was a man who didn't expect to come back!

Horgan crossed the lines far north of his objective. Then, well behind the German trenches, he swung south again. He flew high, as high as the big Liberty could carry him. He didn't see the bat patrol of Pfalzes until the first gust of lead pattered through his wings.

Down they came, six of them, and Horgan knew that he didn't have a chance. Cumbered by the bombs, the two-seater was logy and impossible to maneuver. One by one the Pfalz came down, and as they passed each one lanced a hail of lead into the staggering D. H. Horgan's hand trembled on the bomb release, then came away. Once those bombs were gone, so was his last chance of accomplishing his mission. Those bombs stayed, until the end.

Suddenly Horgan jerked in his seat. Behind him sounded the chatter of the rear Lewis! He swung around, caught a flashing glimpse of a pale face in the pit behind him. Then one of the Pfalz was tumbling down, wrapped in a glowing mantle of scarlet flame.

Horgan's own guns spoke sharply, and another bright-winged Pfalz staggered and flopped into a spin. After that the unequal fight resolved into a nightmare of swirling winged shapes and racketing guns. Gripped by a desperate purpose, Horgan fought mechanically, with the lurking thought that all this was unreal, that it couldn't be happening to him. Then, everything was blotted out as something struck him a stunning blow on the head.

A dizzy, swaying sensation cleared his senses. Dimly he realized that the D. H. was in a spin, and that the dark earth was rushing up at them. He strained at the controls until his bones cracked with the effort. With maddening slowness the

plunging D. H.'s nose lifted. When it came up, scant feet above the ground, Horgan saw he was hurtling over a broad airdrome and knew that it must be one of the squadron fields around Chevilly. But there was no chance to zoom, for riding him down came three Pfalzes their Spandaus spitting ominously. So he did the only thing left to do; he landed, with a prayer on his lips that the twin bombs would not explode.

The wheels touched and the two-seater rolled toward a long row of hangars. Before it had stopped, burly men with guttural voices were at the wings, and the Pfalzes were dropping in for their landing. Neither Horgan or the Germans saw or heard the silent shadow that drifted overhead, then dropped toward a nearby meadow.

Oblivious of the hands that tugged at him, Horgan stared back into the rear pit, into the pale face of Billy Hart.

"You damned fool!" he swore bitterly. "What'd you hide in there for?"

Hart had no chance to answer before a blonde, hawk-featured officer scrambled down from one of the Pfalzes and stepped forward. At his barked orders, both Americans were swiftly thrust toward a small building beside the hangars. Once inside, it proved to be an office.

The officer, whose uniform bore the insignia of captain, stationed two alert guards against the wall, then swung his bleak eyes on the prisoners. His hand stabbed out, pointing at Horgan.

"You," he said harshly, "are Lieutenant Hart!"

As Horgan instinctively opened his mouth to deny the identification the German waved him to silence. "It is useless for you to deny it. You are flying a plane bearing Hart's numerals, and the flying coat you are wearing has his name in the lining!"

That was true. Horgan had donned the coat he had found in the pit of Hart's

ship. He returned the *hauptmann's* stare coolly. "So what?" he demanded.

The *hauptmann's* lips curled savagely. "We know that our commander, Major Herman Jorn, was captured by your squadron last evening. One of our agents visited your field, intending to aid Jorn's escape. He found him brutally murdered! Word has already been flashed to us. And from Jorn's private papers, we have discovered that Lieutenant Hart is the only man who had a valid motive for murdering Jorn! Very well, you *schwein!* I'll show you that two can play at that game. You, Hart, will be shot at sunrise—for murder! As for your companion, I'll decide later what shall be done with him."

"He's not Hart!" the kid cried suddenly. "You're making a mistake. I'm the man you want!"

A gleam of admiration crept into the *hauptmann's* eyes. "Your courage is commendable, Lieutenant. I'm sorry, but there is no possible doubt. You're lying in a misguided effort to save this murderer's life! All right, corporal, take them away."

Ten minutes later, both Americans were staring through the barred window of a building that might have been a replica of the guardhouse at the 52nd, so solidly was it built.

"You were a little late with your confession, kid," Horgan said slowly. "You might as well tell me the story now. It doesn't look as if I'd ever spread it around!"

"I took the only way I saw," Hart said miserably. "All right, Horgan, here it is. In the first place, Major Moran is my father!"

"Your father!" Horgan jerked. "But how—"

Hart sighed. "We didn't get along so well, so I've been using my mother's name for a long while. Just before the United States entered the war, I was working in the technical department of one of our

biggest aircraft companies. A man approached me with a deal to sell him the dope on a new ship. I had access to important files, and I agreed to do it. That man was Jorn. At the last minute I backed out. When I saw Jorn last night, I knew that when he was questioned by Intelligence, he'd spill the story, just to get square. He had the papers with my signature to prove his story, too. That must be what this *hauptmann* meant; that's what put 'em on my trail."

Horgan nodded. "So to keep the disgrace from the Major you killed Jorn!"

Hart shook his head. "I was going to, but just as I neared the guardhouse I heard the shot. Then you showed up, and I did the only thing I could think of. I was scared stiff, but I swear I didn't kill him, Horgan! Don't you see? I couldn't clear you without explaining everything. I've caused Dad enough trouble without breaking him with this. I decided to sacrifice even *you* to keep from letting him know. Then I decided that the least I could do was go along with you and end the whole mess and myself at the same time! I'm damned sorry, Horgan."

"Forget it, kid," Horgan said softly. "The cards fall like this sometime. This is war, and anything is apt to happen."

A silence fell, each man burdened with his thoughts. Horgan was restlessly pacing the cell with the cold gray glimmer of dawn lighted the stone walls. A squad of riflemen came for them then, and led them out into the gray fog. The *hauptmann* of the evening before was in command. The group halted far down the field, where a grove of trees formed a green background.

Horgan stood erect, his back to a tree. His mouth and throat felt dry and hot, his heart beat like a trip-hammer. But he managed to maintain a frozen calm, and he felt no fear, only an overwhelming sense of futility.

At one side, shrieking maledictions and

pleas, Hart was held by two husky soldiers.

"You are witnessing this execution in order that you may understand we German's believe in the ancient law of an eye for an eye, a death for a death. Firing squad, attention!"

Horgan saw the long Mauser barrels lift into line, and strove desperately to fix his mind on some far off thought. It would be easy—just a moment of sharp pain, then everlasting blackness. Somewhere, a long way off, a clipped voice was saying: "Ready! Aim!"

THEN it happened, so swiftly that Horgan was stunned into inaction. A big figure burst from the trees behind him—a figure that carried easily a Lewis machine gun, evidently ripped from a Scarf mounting. Horgan couldn't believe his eyes for a moment, and even the firing squad was stunned into rigidity. This was Major Charles Moran! This apparition was Old Stone Face!

The *hauptmann* flung up his pistol with a choked cry, and at the same instant the heavy gun in Moran's arms broke into crashing life.

Brrrrrrpppt!

Under that lashing fire, the squad melted into a squirming gray mass. The Luger in the *hauptmann's* hand cracked once, and Moran staggered. Then the officer was down, almost cut in two by a second withering gush of lead.

Startled yells broke across the field, and men appeared from barracks and hangars like magic. "To your ship!" Old Stone Face roared. "Quick, you fools!"

The command affected Horgan like an electric current. He jerked an arm at Hart, saw the kid spring forward. Farther up the field their D. H. stood where it had been left the night before. They went for it at a desperate run, Major Moran in the lead. From a hangar door a handful of field gray figures sent

out a hot fire. Moran dropped to one knee, steadying the big Lewis. At its defiant challenge the doorway cleared.

Horgan found himself running side by side with Moran, and gasping words were coming from the Major's mouth.

"Horgan, I—killed Jorn. Knew all about Billy's trouble—he shouldn't talk in his sleep. Didn't want it—to get out, so I plugged Jorn. Was gonna let you take the rap—but something made me follow last night. When I realized what you were—doing for Billy, I knew it was no go!"

He paused to fling a sizzling burst at the pilots' barracks, and Horgan knew Old Stone Face had been hit at least once. But he was up again, staggering on, covering their desperate bid for life.

"The *hauptmann* was right," Moran gasped. "An eye for an eye—a life for a life. One man must die! Now! Get to that prop, Billy! You, Horgan, into the pit. I'll cover you. And so long!"

As the Liberty burst into life, Old Stone Face displayed the first human emotion Horgan had ever seen him express. He saluted—and grinned! And his face shone with a queer light as he ran heavily into the border of trees.

The Liberty lunged forward and heaved into the air. Already pilots and mechanics, now that the menace of the Lewis had disappeared, were rolling ships from the hangars. Horgan banked, came rushing back in a dive. The Vickers sprayed the hangars, the barracks and ships. One Pfalz, just rolling forward, tipped abruptly upon its nose. Twice Horgan roared over the field, and as he passed Billy Hart added to the confusion and turmoil with stabbing streams of death from the rear Lewis.

Then, certain that Old Stone Face must be well clear of the field, Horgan zoomed. Once above the border of trees he flashed a lightning glance around. A half mile away a second D. H. was lifting swiftly. An arm flashed from the cockpit, then the

ship abruptly banked deeper into German territory. Following it with his gaze, Horgan saw the roofs of Chevilly, and something more! Scores of huge, flat-topped tanks! The fuel concentration—and Old Stone Face was hurtling directly at it!

Horgan, unconscious that he was yelling wildly, saw the death trap into which Moran was thundering. He saw a dense circle of black smoke puffs as Archie opened up. He saw a myriad of winged shapes take to the air from all sides. All of them had one aim, one objective—the broad-winged De Haviland of Moran!

Too far away to help, but close enough to watch, Horgan cursed as he urged the Liberty to greater speed. The defending Pfalz and Fokkers and Hals disregarded Horgan's ship, centering only on the more imminent danger. Then they began to dive, like hawks swooping at an eagle. And like an eagle Old Stone Face flew serenely on without varying one inch from his course.

Streams of tracer converged on the leading D. H. in steady streams. The two-seater lurched, wavered, then staggered on. Abruptly it plunged into that terrible cone of fire flung up by the massed Archie batteries. The pursuing Hun ships swerved aside there, until the ground fire should cease.

The American ship was being literally shot to bits in the air. But now it was over the dozens of huge tanks, and it was going down. No power on earth could halt that downward plunge! As if realizing what was happening, the Huns drew back.

The D. H.'s dive steepened, and in the pit a big figure stood erect, arms flung exultantly outward. Down, down—then squarely into the top of a tank near the center of the valley!

A moment's hushed quiet—then a tremendous, booming explosion! A rain of blazing liquid showered into the sky, and from a dozen spots new fires caught. Each

explosion was followed by another, until the huge field was pockmarked by dozens of orange blossoms of flame in the gray dawn.

Horgan saw that this was the end, that there was nothing he could do. He banked away, certain that of the flock of planes that had been low above that valley of death, not half had escaped. In the hellish confusion no one disputed his way. He paused only long enough to drop his two bombs on the hangars of Jorn's staffel, then winged on toward home. He looked back at Hart, and saw that a new resolution had altered the former weak outlines of his face.

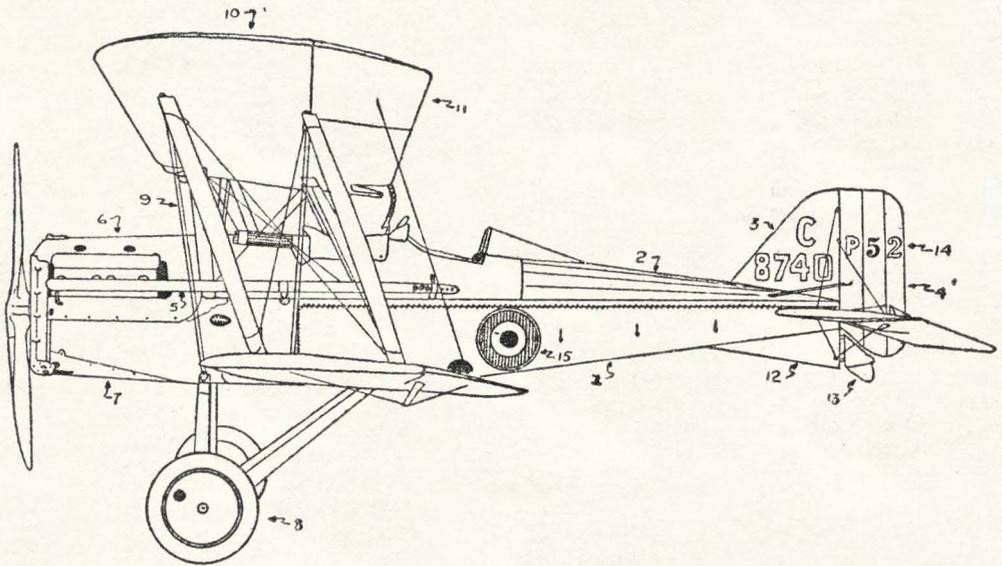
Horgan landed at the emergency field a mile from the 52nd's drome, and on foot the two men crept upon the larger field. Close to the ground it was still foggy and dim and they had no difficulty in eluding the field guard. Hart stayed on watch while Horgan, with a filched crowbar, broke in the guardhouse window. Then he was back, the limp body of Major Jorn in his arms. They crept through the grayness back to the emergency field, and there Jorn was hurriedly buried in a grave that would never be found. A few minutes later, flying back to the 52nd, Horgan knew the thing was finished.

Let Mattick talk now, and see how far he got. Jorn had apparently escaped, and Mattick's story, if he was fool enough to tell it, had not the slightest proof. Horgan looked back over the lines, imagining he saw a faint red glow in the sky—a glow that might mark the funeral pyre of a brave man.

A death for a death, Old Stone Face had said. One man must die! Well, one man had died, and Horgan, who didn't pretend to be an authority on such things, felt sure that if there really was a warrior's Valhalla, right there with Nun-gessor, Guynemer, Luke and the rest, would be Old Stone Face.

ASEMBLIT

By **FREDERICK
BLAKESLEE**



ABOVE, my friends, you see what last month's Asemblit should have looked like when you got through messing around. It is a side view of an S. E. 5, all assembled. Naturally, after you got it into this shape, you were able to shade it and make it look like the finished product. Or was it too tough?

Anyhow, we're going to try again with Asemblit No. 4. This ship, the parts of which you shall find scattered all over pages 104 and 105, and to which you will please turn any minute, is none other than the Fokker Tripe.

All you veterans of the game know what to do, and there is little point in telling you again. For the newcomers, the big trick is to take a piece of tracing paper and sketch the various parts of the plane. For example, you are to pick out the part that looks to you most like a fuselage, then hang on your wheels, struts, etc., simply by locating and sketching them.

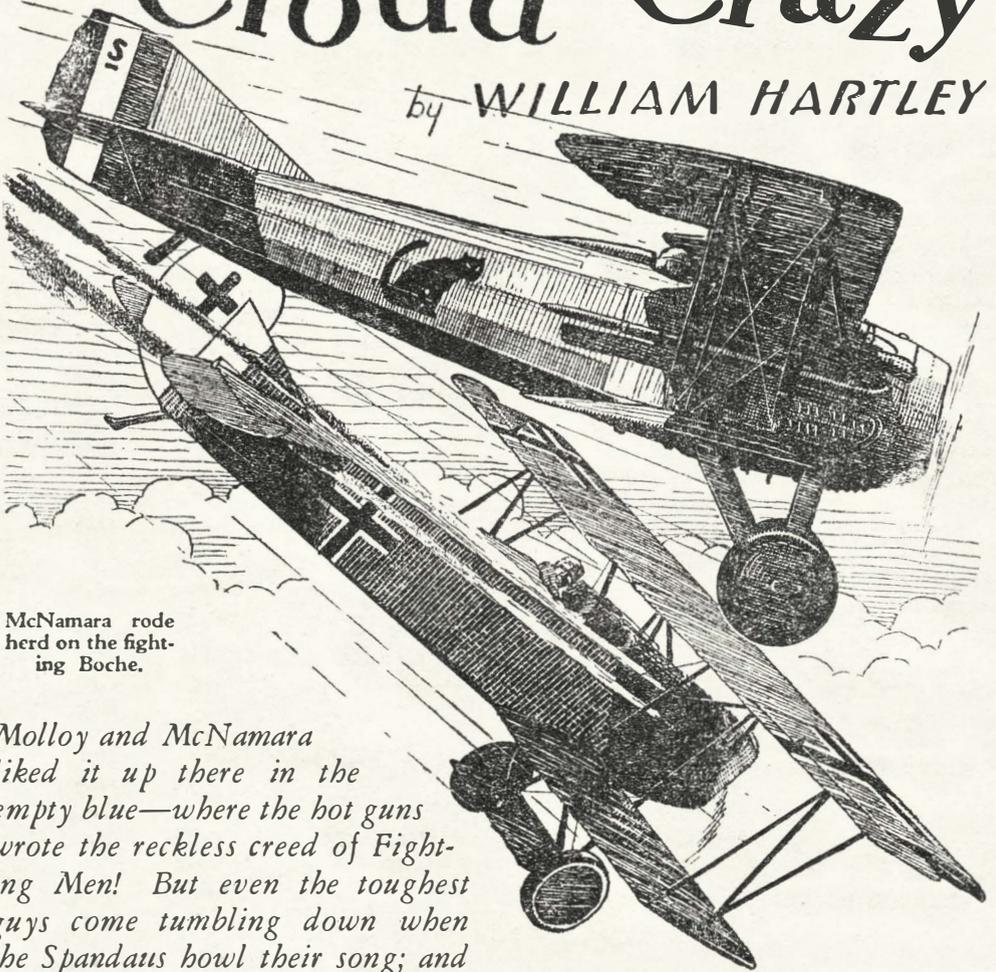
Simpler still, you first trace figure one, then moving your tracing paper over onto figure two, you just figure out what position that piece should be in. Then you try the next piece, and the next. It goes on like that until you find yourself with an airplane that will do anything but fly.

Next month, of course, I will show you how the pieces went together, in case the thing threw you. I have had great loads of mail from you fellows, and I want to thank you for your fine support of Asemblit. Also, in answer to several questions and requests, I am going to make the sixth Asemblit, then the twelfth, the eighteenth and so on, real tough. Every sixth puzzle will be aimed at driving you crazy. You will not know in advance what they are to be, and you'll be strictly on your own. Best of luck to all you guys, and once again, many thanks for your interest. Regards. . . . Fred Blakeslee. . . .

(See page 104)

Cloud Crazy

by WILLIAM HARTLEY



McNamara rode
herd on the fight-
ing Boche.

Molloy and McNamara liked it up there in the empty blue—where the hot guns wrote the reckless creed of Fighting Men! But even the toughest guys come tumbling down when the Spandaus howl their song; and an eagle is only a pigeon when a slug rests in his wings! So fly with these guys while they learn of War in a mixture of Murder and Laughter!

CAPTAIN MIKE MOLLOY settled back snugly in the pit and held the Spad at twelve thousand. The even, throaty roar of the Hisso drowned out the tuneless song he sang to himself, and the thick, irregular banks of clouds hid the distant earth from view.

Mike Molloy was pretty well satisfied with himself, for he had been far afield that morning and his wrist watch told

him that it was six-thirty. He'd been all the way to Vauxaillon, and there he'd dropped down, with a throttled motor, on a field about as big as the back of his hand. There'd been someone to meet him—he'd never seen the man before, and it was doubtful if anyone would ever see him again. But the man had known the all important password, and now Mike was returning with a paper that meant the fate of thousands of men. It was a map, a large map, and it gave the detailed position of every German outfit in the Aisne-Marne sector.

It was invaluable, and Molloy felt a justifiable pride when he thought that he had been sent to get it. G. H. Q. would

send only a man they could trust to the last ditch, and one with the courage and resourcefulness to get that map back at all costs and in spite of any obstacle that might be placed in his path.

To be chosen was an honor, but to be chosen above Tommy McNamara was a joy the like of which he never hoped to know again. Molloy and McNamara were the twin terrors of the Western Front, and they'd fought by each other's side through every mile of air along the lines and in every bar from the Front to Paris. And when there was no common foe, they pounded each other to a pulp, for any reason at all, and were strangely happy.

It didn't matter to Mike that Major Bowers of the 24th had encountered a great deal of difficulty in choosing between McNamara and himself. Mike didn't know that the Major had received the order from Wing to select a man for this mission and had then walked to the estaminet, determined to make Molloy and McNamara flip a coin for the privilege. It must be one of them, for no one else would do. But when he had arrived at the bar, Molloy was the only one who was sober enough to understand what he was talking about.

McNamara had been sprawled on a table, fast asleep and more than a little drunk, and after attempting to wake him and be fair about this thing, Bowers had given up in disgust and had awarded the difficult task to Molloy by default.

And now he was riding back, and he thrust the map into the pocket of the cockpit and phrased his jokes at McNamara for not being able to drink like a man and do an honest day's work in the morning. He pursed his lips and framed the first cutting sentence—then stared in dumbfounded amazement at the row of holes that suddenly punched along his upper left wing and headed for the cockpit.

He kicked right rudder and went slid-

ing down the side of a cloud, then turned around and took a good look at the cause of all his trouble. He didn't have to look very far, for plummeting right down after him was a bright yellow Fokker, its Spandaus flaming viciously.

Even as Molloy's hands tightened on the trips, he thought of the Major's parting words: "And if you get that thing, Mike, bring it right on back! None of your damn fighting on this trip! Stay away from trouble, but if it finds you, run like hell for home. That map is a hell of a lot more important than any pleasure you might find in fighting. Remember that!" Molloy cursed bitterly, then pulled back on the stick and headed for a nearby cloud.

"Okay, pal!" he shouted at the figure in the pit of the Fokker. "I'll run on home, but don't try this stunt when I haven't anything else to do. You're lucky this time, but don't try it again."

But the German had other ideas. He followed Molloy up out of the dive and his Spandaus spoke again. Molloy could see the tracer shooting up, out in front of the Hisso, and he had to bank on a dime to keep from running into the leaden stream.

As the German came zooming up to his level, Molloy tried it again, but the Hun would have none of it. Once more the hail of the lead cut off his path to the cloud, and once more he had to pull the Spad back on its heels to avoid being hit. And that decided him. You can run just so far from a fight, but if the other guy is really in earnest, you've got to turn around eventually and start swinging.

Mike pulled the roaring crate around in a fast wing-over and held his thumb on the button. The Vickers chattered on the cowling and he saw the slugs bite into the Fokker's empennage. A big smile wreathed his face as he compensated with the stick, but the Fokker twisted over on the left wing and slid out of range.

Molloy followed swiftly, but the German Immelmanned beautifully, then came back roaring. Molloy was forced to get out of the way.

As the Fokker rushed past him, Mike saw the grinning figure in the pit and noticed the insignia on the side of the fuselage. It was a rear view of a stout, healthy pig, and the animal's head was turned around and one eye was closed in a cheerful wink.

"A smart guy, eh?" Molloy snarled. "You'll get yours, Fritzie, so don't think the affair is so damned funny!"

He whipped the Spad around and saw that the German had gained a hundred feet of altitude on him. He pulled up the nose and fired a short, savage burst, then ducked as a hail of Spandau slugs ripped away part of the pit coaming. He swung the nose around and dropped in a stall, and the Vickers sang again. But Mike was wide by feet. Then he pushed the stick to the wall and dropped her a thousand feet till the Hisso picked up again.

The Fokker was right at his back, and he twisted and turned to get away from the lead that threatened to fill the pit. He tried to whip back in a tight bank, but the Boche guns continued to roar. Mike watched in dismay while the Vickers before him were hammered to a useless mass of metal. Some of the slugs must have penetrated to the motor, too, for the Hisso began to cough uncertainly.

"A hell of a spot to be in!" he snorted. "No guns, not a hell of a lot of motor, and a map that's *got* to get home! Won't I catch hell from the Old Man if I ever get out of this!"

But there didn't seem to be much chance of that. The guy in the Fokker was doing a very complete job, he thought, and unless a miracle occurred, Mike Molloy wouldn't be showing up again at the 24th, except for his funeral.

He nursed the dying Hisso back to life and swung to the left in a necessarily

slow bank. Then the firing from behind him stopped.

Mike was too busy for a moment to notice it, and when he did, he turned around, a puzzled frown on his face. The Fokker swept down and alongside, and the pilot leaned from the pit and waved a hand aloft in a gesture of farewell. Then the German pointed at his own guns, then at Molloy. Next, his thumb and forefinger went to his nose and held it in derision. The Boche went over on one wing and roared for the German side of the lines.

"Why, you—" Molloy roared as he watched him go. "I don't need any favors from you, you tramp!" But he was grinning in spite of his anger. "Well, Fritzie—I guess it's a damned good thing for me that you're a nice guy," Molloy finished, as he worked the stick and limped for home.

MIKE set the crate down on the home carpet and was just climbing from the pit when a gruff voice assailed him: "Where the hell have you been, so bright and early in the morning?"

He turned and saw McNamara staring at him. Molloy's face split in a big grin. "Oh, I've just been on a little errand over to Vauxillon," he said slowly.

"Vauxillon! What the hell are you giving me? What would *you* be doing over there?"

Molloy shrugged his shoulders casually. "A little job that G. H. Q. wanted done, so the major asked me if I wanted to work it for them."

McNamara didn't try to hide his anger. "And where was I when all this was going on?"

"You were asleep, dear, so the major didn't want to bother the little boy."

"Asleep, eh? Just when I grab a nap you pull a sneaky stunt like that on me. It's just like you, Molloy. A punch in the mouth might do you a lot of good."

"Why, you bum!" Molloy snarled at

him. "If you could learn to take two drinks without passing out, then they might ask you to work on a tough job once in awhile. A punch in the mouth! You know what happened the last time you tried that! You damn near had your head handed to you! And if it hadn't been—"

McNamara stepped toward him, his big right hand pulled back, when a voice interrupted them.

"What's going on here? Molloy, did you bring back what you went for?"

The two big men whirled and turned to face the trim figure who had spoken. Major Bowers' face was grim and anxious, and Molloy answered quickly, "Yes, sir. I have it right here."

He reached into the cockpit with pride and drew forth the map.

"It was good work, Mike. You can't imagine what this means to us. You'll be hearing from G. H. Q., I imagine. They won't let a thing like this go unnoticed."

He took the roll of parchment and walked back to the Operations shack. Molloy leered at McNamara. "Get a load of that, my drunken friend. 'G. H. Q. won't let a thing like this go unnoticed.' Like that?"

McNamara snorted in disgust. "You've got a hatful of luck, Molloy. If I'd been awake he'd never have let you manage the affair."

"Like hell he wouldn't! He knows who can fly around here and who can't. He simply picked the best man he could find and let it go at that."

"You mean the best man he could find *awake*," McNamara told him. He started to turn away, and his eyes drifted to the Spad that Molloy had just brought in. They brightened, suddenly, and his face broke into a smile.

"Well! Who have you been fooling around with?" He eyed the smashed guns, the perforated wings, then he spotted the jagged holes in the motor cowling.

"Just some gent I ran into on the way back." Molloy tried to dismiss the damage lightly.

"Some *gent!* It looks more like some *truck* you ran into!" McNamara was happy, now, as he surveyed the riddled ship. He was keenly aware of Molloy's embarrassment.

"You must have just about gotten back in this thing. Boy, that guy sure did a job on you! You can't give me any song and dance about this."

Molloy suddenly abandoned any attempt at deception, and his tone become confidential.

"Okay, okay! I was in a scrap and got a few slugs in the crate. Some guy hopped me when I was on the way home, and we had quite a time. The punk could fly like nobody's business."

McNamara shrugged. "It's no great trick to knock *you* down, but it's nice to hear you admit that someone did it." He was examining the motor more carefully.

Molloy was indignant. "What the hell do you mean, 'Knock me down'? I didn't say anything like that! The guy could fly well enough, but he wasn't *that* good."

"Listen," McNamara grinned at him, "this Hisso is all shot to hell. It couldn't fly from here across the field. Stop feeding me that bull. The guy knocked you down and you know it."

Molloy shrugged. "All right, he knocked me down. And since I've let it go this far I may as well tell you the rest. He didn't only kick hell out of the motor, but look up there." He pointed up to the guns, or to what remained of them, on their mountings.

McNamara whistled. "Boy, he did a job on you, didn't he. I'm surprised that you came down in one piece. How come a few of those slugs didn't go into your thick head?"

"That's the worst part of it. The louse had me dead to rights, then he cut away and *waved* to me! It wasn't bad enough

that he was lucky and got in a few shots—he had to give me the high sign and tell me that I was lousy!”

McNamara was convulsed at this new confession and howled until he attracted the attention of nearly everyone on the field. Several pilots looked over at them and Molloy hissed, “Shut up, you clown! Keep this story under your hat! I don’t know why the hell I ever told you about it, in the first place.”

“Okay,” McNamara choked. “I won’t mention it. But to think of the great Molloy getting the berry, and admitting it—what the hell’s the world coming to?” A second later, he added, “Who was it? Von Schole? Markwitz? Pladen?”

“None of those guys,” Molloy answered. “I never saw the crate before, and besides—he could make those other monkeys look sick. He had a green Fokker.”

“Any insignia on it?”

“Yeah. The guy’s not only a flyer—he’s a humorist. There’s the picture of a pig on the side of the ship; the part of a pig that goes over the fence last.”

McNamara’s expression suddenly changed and his whole countenance shouted of incredulous surprise.

“You mean to say—” he started, but Molloy interrupted him.

“Yeah,” he snarled. “Funny, ain’t it? In a pig’s—”

“Well, for—” McNamara was for once unable to speak. “Do you know who *that* was?” he managed to gasp.

“How the hell do I know who it was? Maybe it was the Wright Brothers and one of the Three Little Pigs! I suppose you know this mug, huh, wise guy?”

“*Know* him?” McNamara shouted. “I used to *fly* with him!”

“Come out of the fog,” Molloy snorted. “I thought I made it clear to you that this guy was a *German*. Just when did you quit the Imperial Air Service, *Herr* McNamara?”

McNamara had at last gained complete control of himself.

“I’m not kidding! It’s quite a story. The only time I ever saw an insignia like that was when I was barnstorming around the States, with little Johnny Shultz! From the way you describe it, it’s the same thing. And you can’t tell me there are two guys with that same idea.”

“So this squirt is an old pal of yours! No wonder he did a job on me.”

“A pale of mine! Say, Johnny Shultz and I were two blades on the same prop. We used to hit every county fair in the sticks with an old Curtiss. It was screwy business, but we made plenty of dough. Shultz could fly an egg-crate, and those ships we had then weren’t much better. Why he was the first guy that ever tried to walk a wing—he was drunk—and I was flying the plane.”

“Just buddies, eh? Well, what the hell is he doing in the German Air Service?” Molloy wanted to know.

“About six months before the U. S. walked into this mess, Shultz decided that flying a bunch of wire and rags around a peaceful country wasn’t exciting enough for him. He came on over here, and being a German, joined up with them.”

“It all sounds very pretty,” Molloy said, “but he’s a tough hombre. He’s going to cause a lot of trouble if he sticks around here. You better be careful, Mac. If he did this to *me*, he’ll sure as hell just take you apart.”

McNamara grinned. “I said that Shultz was good, but I’m a damn sight better than he ever was. It’ll be a sorry day for Johnny if he ever runs into me.”

“You’re a lot of wind, mister,” Molloy told him. “You wouldn’t go within a mile of that guy!”

McNamara tapped him on the chest. “Listen, punk, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. This patrol is due back in an hour. If I see Shultz—that’s all I need—I’ll bring him back here and introduce you to him.”

"Nuts!" Molloy answered. "You'll be damn lucky if you bring yourself back."

McNAMARA strode to his Spad and climbed into the pit. He waved the chocks away, then gave the idling Hiss the gun. He swept down the field with the other six planes in formation behind him and lofted into the cloudy sky. His mind was filled with the information Molloy had given him. Johnny Shultz! It had been two years since he had seen the little, tow-headed Dutchman, and that had been on the occasion of Johnny's sailing for the other side.

McNamara knew that he ought to cause a lot of trouble in the sky, for Shultz could fly like a bat out of hell. The fact that he had beaten Molloy to the punch was mute testimony to that observation.

The thought that he might meet up with Molloy's enemy of the earlier morning occurred to him, and he laughed. That would be the payoff! Two guys who had entrusted their lives to each other, in crates that would hardly get off the ground, now popping away with a couple of machine guns. But he thrust the thought aside. Hell, Shultz must have had enough, in his scrap with Molloy, for any morning's work. He'd probably gone on home. But the idea of meeting, even later on, gave McNamara no pleasure at all. He knew that Shultz was no better flyer than himself, but he liked the guy, and he couldn't imagine how he'd react if he were called upon to shoot him down.

But he dismissed the whole business and turned his attention to the details of the flight. He scanned the sky about him for signs of enemy ships, and seeing none, settled back in the pit for a comfortable ride.

It was on their way back that McNamara saw the eight Fokkers winging towards them.

McNamara fired a warning burst from his guns and pointed ahead. He saw that

the rest of the flight had seen his signal, and the chatter of warming Vickers echoed through the sky.

The German crates were coming out of the newly risen sun, and it wasn't until the two flights were a thousand yards apart that he could make out the color of the Fokkers. Seven of them were coal black, but the leader caused McNamara's pulse to pick up a few beats. The plane was green!

He brushed the thought aside. What the hell if it was green? He had seen ships that color before, and none of them had carried Johnny Shultz. This was just another German patrol—one of the hundreds he had seen—

But at that very moment the eight Fokkers hiked up and off to the left a bit, fighting for altitude, and all the uncertainty was ended. There, clearly emblazoned on the leader's fuselage, was the pig!

Strange emotions fought their way through McNamara's soul. Here was a man with whom he had flown, with whom he had baited Death on a score of occasions—and this was their final meeting! One of them would fly away from this mess, and the other would keep an oft-postponed date with Death.

And then the astounding truth came into his mind. He knew that the man in the green Fokker was Shultz—but Shultz had no idea that McNamara was within a thousand miles of the scene. He was pitted against a man he knew, but who didn't know him.

And as if the Fates were determined to enjoy this jest to the fullest, the green plane headed straight for *him*, Spandaus snarling viciously. Shultz had only seen the flight leader's streamers and was trying to pick a tough opponent.

His mind a jumbled mass of whirling thoughts, McNamara shot his hand up in signal and the flight zoomed to meet the Fokkers. He was relieved of making any

decision for himself, for Shultz' green plane was already well on its way to meet him.

McNamara kicked the Spad up and around, avoiding the first burst. Shultz tore under him, and for an instant the helmeted head was clearly outlined in his sights. Instinctively, his hand tightened on the trips, then relaxed. He shook his head. This was going to be tough.

But he knew that he couldn't fool with a flyer of Shultz' ability. A careless man with such a foe would be throwing away his life.

Shultz whipped out to the left suddenly, but McNamara followed him as a hungry trout follows a fly. He shortened the circle and the empennage of the German ship swam into the Aldis. He let go with a short burst and watched the linen shred on the vertical fin. His lips a tight line, he compensated with the stick and raised the level of his fire.

The green plane whipped up as if it were being yanked on a string, then tore out of the loop at the top. McNamara found himself on the other end of the leash, now, and he watched the tracer scuttle between his wings. He executed a beautiful *chandelle*, but Shultz followed him relentlessly. McNamara smiled tightly. The little tramp hadn't lost any of his skill with the stick!

He pulled up the nose of the Spad and cut the gun, and as the ship fell into a stall, Shultz roared by above him. McNamara tucked her nose down, fed the Hisso the soup, then leveled off. Shultz had overshot him badly, and as he climbed, McNamara had time to look over the rest of the situation.

The fighting ships were spread over a mile of sky, and the fight was fairly even. Swiftly McNamara turned his attention to Shultz who came roaring back at him. A moment later, Mac managed to be underneath the Fokker. Tilting his nose, he caught the sheen of the whirling prop

right in the middle of his rings. He thumbed the trips as he realized that this was a chance he hadn't hoped for. The Fokker was above him, and the positions of the ships made it almost impossible for him to hit the pilot. Unless his slugs went clean on through the motor, Shultz was safe.

He roared with pleasure when the German plane's prop splintered into a thousand pieces and showered down the sky. The Fokker rocked as if on a cradle, but it was soon brought under control and started down towards him in a stiff glide. He almost jumped out of the pit when he saw the Spandaus suddenly start to blink again and a row of holes appeared right above him in the center section.

He kicked left rudder and hauled out of the way.

"The lousy little tramp!" he shouted. "On his way down and he thought he could get me into a swindle!" Then he grinned. "That maniac doesn't know when to quit!"

Mac hopped the Spad down to a position beside the Fokker and pointed to a long stretch of meadow below. But the pilot in the other plane merely thumbed his nose and turned his crate toward the German lines.

McNamara swore. "What's the matter with you, Schultz? Are you crazy?"

He zoomed up in back of the other ship and poured a long burst into the rear of the fuselage. The pilot jerked his head around and looked at him, then nodded and pulled the plane around in a flat bank. McNamara kept out of the way of those Spandaus and maintained his rear-guard position. From time to time he drummed a short burst through the wings or into the fuselage behind the pit, and he roared with laughter when Shultz turned and shook a mittened fist at him.

THE Fokker flattened out over the field, and McNamara recognized it as a

pasture that was not far from the field of the 24th. The green job made a perfect dead-stick landing, and McNamara set the Spad down right at its tail.

He cut the motor to idling speed, and as the other figure leaped from the pit, he shouted, "Hold everything, Johnny! Throw away that rod!"

Shultz had been about to draw his Luger when he heard the voice, but he stopped as if he'd been shot. He turned towards the Spad and said, "Who the hell is that?"

McNamara laughed and yelled, "Toss that gun on the ground, stupid! You know me better than to go pulling a gat on me. It's McNamara!"

Shultz stared, then dropped the gun on the ground and ran to the other plane.

"Mac!" he shouted. "You lousy horse-thief! What the hell are you doing here?"

"Ridin' herd on you, you half-witted punk!" McNamara's face became suddenly serious. "Say, do you know you almost hurt me, up there? What's the matter with you, anyway?"

Shultz grimaced. "Now just what did you want me to do, throw you a box of candy? What are you talking about?"

McNamara snapped his fingers. "I'm so damned surprised to see you that I don't know what I'm saying. How've you been? What have you been doing?"

"Just now I've got a job as a conductor on the subway, but I don't think it will last. What have you been doing, taking the pipe? You sound screwy."

McNamara grinned. "Say, Johnny, don't they teach you to fly in that crummy army? You looked pretty lousy up there."

"Stop it! Stop it!" Shultz snorted. "You were lucky, Mac, that's all. Lucky as hell."

The laughter left McNamara's face and voice. "Listen, Johnny, I've got to get back to see how the rest of the flight made out." A glance at the sky a moment before had revealed that it was empty of planes.

"You'll have to give yourself up, anyway—there'll be someone along here in a few minutes—so why not hop on the wing and I'll give you a ride back to the field? We can put on a little binge tonight. And there's a guy I want you to meet."

Shultz shrugged his shoulders. "What the hell have I got to say about it? Sure, I'll ride with you."

He hopped up on the wing and held onto the guy wires, close to the pit. McNamara gave his Spad the gun and the game little ship staggered off the ground with the double burden.

It took him only a few minutes to reach the field. Setting the ship down, he saw the group of pilots and mechanics running from the hangar. He grinned when he saw the form of Molloy lounge out of the *estaminet* across the road, and he thought of the guy's amazement when he found out that McNamara really had brought Shultz back with him.

He brushed aside all the frenzied questions that were shot at him, and asked, "The Major in the office?"

Someone said, "No. He's gone over to Wing. Left word that he'll be back in an hour or two."

"How many ships did we lose?"

"One. It was Roget."

McNamara shook his head. "It's tough. He was a good guy."

Someone asked, "Who's the Kraut, Tommy? Where did you pick him up?"

McNamara rocked with mirth as Shultz snarled at the fellow, "What are you looking for, wise guy, a smack in the puss?"

The assemblage literally went back on their heels at the retort, and McNamara killed their curiosity with a sweeping introduction.

"Fellows, I'd like you to meet Johnny Shultz. I used to fly with him, back in the States. He just got mixed up with the wrong ball club. Johnny, meet the 23rd."

Johnny said, "Hello, boys—how's

Brooklyn doin'?" and the dazed group muttered, "Hello."

McNamara climbed out of the pit and Shultz jumped off the wing. Arm in arm they strode towards the *estaminet* where Molloy would be. Little Shultz was dwarfed beside the huge figure of McNamara, his blond head scarcely reaching the big man's shoulder. He had to walk rapidly to keep up with the big Yank, and as they walked he asked, "How long you been around here, Mac?"

"Quite a while. You're new in this sector, aren't you?"

"Yeah, I came up the other day. I been down the line a ways."

"Listen," McNamara said. "We're goin' to meet a guy who flies with me. He's a great Irishman, and he can fly and fight like hell. You knocked him down this morning—I don't know how—but kid him about it. I'd go to hell and back again for the clown, but I like to get his goat."

Shultz said, "Sure. Anything to oblige a friend."

As they neared the *estaminet*, Molloy stood in the doorway and stared at them. His face was a mask of mingled curiosity and disbelief, as if he was surprised at what he saw, but didn't believe it.

The pair approached, and McNamara said. "Mike, I'd like you to meet a friend of mine, Johnny Shultz. Johnny, this is Mike Molloy. I think he said he had a little trouble with you this morning."

They shook hands, and Molloy grinned and said, "Yeah, you sure put it over me like a tent this morning Shultz."

Shultz shrugged disparagingly, then he looked at Molloy.

"Are you just up, kid? Replacement?"

Molloy colored and said, "Hell, no! I've been around a long time. Why?"

"I don't know. The way you flew this morning, I figured you were just out of training school."

His tone was matter-of-fact and his face was absolutely blank.

Molloy looked at him sharply, then at McNamara whose shout of laughter almost brought the wall down.

"A replacement! Just out of training school! Boy, he's got you all lined up, Mike!"

Molloy snarled, and ignoring Shultz, he started towards McNamara, who was helpless with laughter. The little German stepped in between.

"Take it easy, Molloy. It's only a joke. We thought we'd kid you."

Molloy paused for a moment, then broke out in a wide grin.

"Okay, pal. I guess I rate it, after the lousy show I put on this morning. Come on inside. The drinks are all on me."

"All of them?" asked Shultz. "That's a big order, my friend. It's easy to see that you've never been out with me before."

And it was a big order. For two hours the trio stood at the bar. McNamara and Shultz relished their barnstorming tour, town by town, then McNamara and Molloy gave an account of the flying they had done at the Front. Shultz entertained them with tales of his two years in the German Imperial Air Service, and soon there was a large group gathered around the three, all howling with laughter.

But there had to be an end to such pleasantries, and it came in the form of the adjutant, who tapped McNamara on the shoulder and said: "Major Bowers is back. He wants to see you and the prisoner."

McNamara winced. "That sounds lousy." He threw an arm over Shultz's shoulders. "Come on, kid, we'll get this over with. Want to come along, Mike?"

Molloy finished his drink and said, "Yeah, we'll see if we can't fix up something nice for you, Johnny."

Together they made for the Operations shack, and there they found Major Bowers studying the map that Molloy had brought in earlier in the morning. The

Major looked up as they entered and smiled.

"Well, it looks like a class reunion or something!"

McNamara started to explain the situation, but Bowers held up his hand.

"I know all about it, Tommy. The adjutant told me the whole story." He turned to Shultz. "Glad to meet you, Shultz. From all I hear, you know a thing or two about handling a plane."

Shultz smiled. "Thanks, Major. This outfit you have here isn't so bad, either."

Bowers acknowledged the compliment and turned to McNamara and Molloy.

"I took this map down to Wing, but the Colonel was out on inspection. I left word for him to come up here when he got back, and I expect him any minute. You'd better keep Shultz out of sight. I don't suppose the old fellow would be so crazy about all this informality."

He said to Shultz. "You'll have to go back to a camp tonight, of course, but I don't see any reason why you shouldn't enjoy yourself until then."

SHULTZ nodded, and when Bowers turned to speak to the others again, his eyes roamed over the room. He had already noticed the map on the desk, and its meaning was clear to anyone who had ever seen one of the type before. His glance left the map and centered on Bowers' big service automatic, which the major had unbuckled and laid on the desk at his elbow.

Shultz lighted a cigaret, while the others were talking, then bent over to put the charred match in an ash tray near the center of the desk. His hand completed the gesture, then continued on like a streak of lightning and grasped the big gun. He whipped it to hip level just as the others in the room turned to stare at him in amazement.

"Hold everything!" he snapped. "I don't want to kill anybody at this stage

of the game." His voice was almost drowned out by the roar of an incoming patrol. Through the windows, they could see the Spads settling down on the tarmac, and a grin lighted Shultz' face. "There's my ride home," he said.

His face was grim as he addressed the group.

"This has all been very nice, fellows, and I hate like hell to pull a crummy stunt like this. But you seem to have forgotten that *I* have a job, too. This war is a lousy mess, but it's a serious business. I'm on one side of the argument and you're on the other. And that's the way we have to finish the game. It's not nice, but it's the truth."

He walked towards McNamara and Molloy, who were staring at him dumfounded, and removed the guns from their holsters. These he jammed into his belt and backed to the door.

"You've been damned pleasant," he said. "And I hope to hell we don't meet again until this thing is over." Then his face broke into a grin. "But what a bunch of clowns! Leaving a gun around where I could pick it up! A kid's stunt!" He shook his head, then reached for the map with his free hand and rolled it up. "I know some people who'll be interested in this."

He backed to the door, then his gun suddenly shifted full on McNamara, who had growled low in his throat and started forward.

Shultz' voice was like ice. "Easy, Mac! I wouldn't like to do it, but I'd have to!" McNamara checked himself.

Shultz had reached the door, now, and he sought in back of him for the key in the latch. He removed it and opened the door slowly. He served a final warning to the three men in the room. "Keep your shirts on, now, and don't let's any of us get reckless." He waved a cheery salute. "I'll be seein' you," then he was gone.

They heard the key turn in the lock,

then McNamara rushed for the door. It resisted his efforts, and he ran for a window. He reached it and looked out just in time to see Shultz reach the line of ships. Most of them were attended by mechanics, but one, still turning over, was off to the side a bit. He ran for this plane, and McNamara saw one of the mechanics dash to intercept him. The gun in Shultz' hand spoke once, and the man fell to the ground, grabbing at his leg.

McNamara jerked open the window and leaped to the ground, Molloy at his heels. Behind them they heard Bowers shouting as they ran for the Spads.

They reached the crates as Shultz roared down the field in the stolen plane and hoisted it into the air. They brushed the astounded mechanics aside and leaped into neighboring cockpits and rocked the planes off the chocks. The ships ripped down the field as one, and with one motion lifted and started the chase.

Molloy knew that they had a good chance of catching Shultz, even though he had a big lead. But whether or not their chances were favorable, Molloy resolved to follow him right down to the ground, if need be. No one was going to get away with a stunt like that! Fun's fun, but you had to draw the line somewhere.

A mile from the field, he was delighted to see the Hisso of Shultz' plane throw a black cloud of smoke out of the exhaust. It sputtered once or twice, then picked up again. It wasn't much of a delay, but it was sufficient to allow Molloy and McNamara to cut down the gap that separated them.

Shultz must have known that it was useless to continue the flight with both of them on his tail, for suddenly he whirled and headed for his two pursuers. He waved his hand above his head once, then the Vickers on the nose of the Spad began to speak.

Molloy was in the lead, and the first

few slugs chewed at one of the struts on his left wing. He kicked out of the way, and Shultz went roaring under him and lanced for McNamara's plane. The Vickers once more chattered their song, and Molloy, looking over his shoulder, rose in the pit and ripped out a curse as he saw the Spad rear like a wounded horse, then go sliding off aimlessly on one wing. It's flight was fairly steady at first, then it became more erratic until it finally resolved into a full, and uncontrolled spin, as if the man at the stick were slowly relinquishing his grip of the crate.

Shultz turned on a dime and once more headed for home. He was below Molloy, now, but some five hundred yards closer to the lines, and Mike could see that he was determined to hold the lead. The hot blood boiled in Molloy's veins as he threw a look over his shoulder and saw McNamara's plane nearing the earth. It was running wild, now, and even as he watched, it roared into a clump of trees. The ship buckled over on one wing, then sank from sight. Suddenly a cloud of black, swift smoke roared up from the spot, and Molloy pounded his fist savagely against the pit coaming.

His eyes were filled with a strange moisture, and he roared into the slipstream, "Damn you, Shultz! That's the pay-off! I'll get you now if I have to follow you to hell and back!"

His heart was filled with such hate as he had never imagined possible. Nor had he ever known how much his friendship for McNamara had meant until now.

HE urged the Spad to its limit and used every trick he had ever known to squeeze more speed from the trembling Hisso. And he was gaining. Slowly but surely, the ship that Shultz flew was coming back to him, and Molloy grinned a bitter, killer's smile.

The planes swept over the lines, Molloy drawing ever closer. Four or five

miles farther on, with a Hun drome clearly visible, Shultz turned again to fight. Molloy's lips were tight and cold, and he headed for the other ship with no thought of his own safety. The hell with that kind of flying! He wanted to do but one thing, and in accomplishing it, he had no regard of consequences. Shultz was going down, and whether or not he went down with him was unimportant.

Molloy held his fire until the ships were a hundred yards apart, then pressed his thumb to the button. He could hear Shultz's lead whining between his wings, but he had eyes only for his own tracers. They missed the pit by inches.

Shultz broke, at the last possible moment, and Molloy raked his belly with a hail of sudden death. They squared away again, and then for ten minutes they put on an exhibition that was beautiful in its execution, but deadly in its meaning. One of these men was going to die, perhaps both of them, and they flew like creatures possessed.

So absorbed were they in their duel that they failed to see the cloud of ships that rose from the drome below. As six Fokkers approached the level of the two fighting planes, Molloy finally got the other Spad in the spot he wanted. He was above and to the left, and Shultz was trying frantically to get out of the way. Molloy pressed the trips and a short, ten-round burst stuttered through his guns—then they were silent.

He cursed bitterly, and saw that the belts were empty. Then his face lighted as he saw the other plane veer wildly and drop for the carpet.

A hit on his last few slugs! Fate had played kindly with him after all, and the mission that he had chosen was accomplished. McNamara would have no cause to be displeased now. His death had been paid for in blood.

He watched the other ship plunge to earth, then became aware of the fire about

him. The sky was alive with guns, it seemed, and he could feel the slugs drumming into his ship. He looked about him and saw that he was completely hemmed in. He shrugged his shoulders. What the hell! His work was done, and anything that happened after this didn't matter at all.

The leader of the attacking planes signalled that he was to land on the drome below, and McNamara nodded his head and started down for the field.

He saw the crumbled wreckage of the other Spad as he landed, and he smiled grimly as he noticed that a group of men were pulling a limp figure from the pit.

Then he rolled to a stop while eager hands hauled him from the pit. He was hurried across the field to a small, sheet-iron office, and there, across a desk, sat the *kommandant* of the outfit.

SEVERAL questions were put to him in German, and he shrugged his shoulders. He didn't know what the hell they were talking about, and he didn't care. And then there was an interruption.

Several figures entered the room, and between them they carried a limp form that Molloy recognized as Shultz. He smiled grimly—then his mouth flew open wide.

Shultz was stirring! The man's eyes opened and he looked about him. Then he saw Molloy and frowned. His right hand went up to his left shoulder where Molloy could see the red blood coming through his shirt.

"Molloy, I don't know what the hell happened to you since this morning, but it made a hell of a difference in your flying. I couldn't get near you."

"You know what made the difference," Molloy snarled. "McNamara wouldn't drill you, you louse, but it didn't take you long to send a slug into him!"

Shultz' face was serious and pleading. "Believe me, feller, I didn't mean to hit

him, so help me! I thought I saw a chance to take the tail off the plane, but I must have gone wide."

Molloy didn't answer, and the *kommandant* spoke sharply to Shultz, who replied at length and took from his pocket the map that had been on Cummings' desk. He laid it before the man and turned to Molloy.

"He says that you'll be kept in the guardroom, down the hall, till they can arrange to take you to the prison camp. I'm sorry, kid, but this whole damn thing is so screwed up that I don't know whether I'm coming or going."

Molloy didn't reply. His eyes were running over the room. The men who had brought Shultz in had left, and now the little blond flyer, the *kommandant* and one guard with a Mauser were the only occupants of the office. He figured his chances swiftly. Shultz was wounded and wouldn't be any trouble. The guard was behind him, and things would be arranged so that he'd be taken care of. The fat *kommandant* was seated behind the desk, and Molloy thought he could act quickly enough to forestall any interference on his part.

The thought was transmitted to action. He grabbed Shultz by the collar and thrust the small German before him towards the guard. The fellow swung up the rifle, but Molloy's body was shielded by Shultz.

Out of the corner of his eye, Molloy saw the *kommandant* rip open a desk drawer and jerk out a Luger. Just as the shot was aimed Molloy swung his foot and kicked over the desk. He felt the slug crease his ribs at the same moment that the desk went crashing over on the officer. The gun shot out of the German's hand and landed in a corner of the room.

He had pushed Shultz toward the guard, who was maneuvering for a clear shot, and now swung the little man's body so that it hit and deflected the muz-

zle of the Mauser. He pushed the flyer aside and swung from his heels for the guard's jaw. The impact was solid, and the fellow crashed against the wall and crumbled in a heap.

Molloy whirled to see Shultz diving for the Luger, and he hurled his body through the air. He landed on Shultz' back, and he felt the breath go out of the man. Molloy's long arm reached out and the Luger nestled in his fist.

He came to his feet and surveyed the situation. All was as it should be. There were planes roaring out on the field, the same flight that had pulled him down, and the single shot had gone unnoticed. But the guard was waking up. Molloy walked over, yanked the man to his feet, then hit him flush on the button with his right hand. He'd be out of trouble while it lasted.

The *kommandant* was struggling with the desk, and Molloy let him lay there until he had pulled Shultz erect. The little man was winded, and the flesh wound in his shoulder was bleeding more freely. Aside from that, he was all right.

"So you were the smart guy who grabbed a gun we left lying around, eh?" he snorted. "Careless, weren't we! Hell, I didn't even need a gun to bust this joint! Where's all that German method and precision I've been hearing about? It was like taking candy from a baby!"

He bent over and lifted the desk. "Come on, fat. Get up out of there. We're going to use you."

He turned again to Shultz. He grabbed him by the back of his collar, and with the Luger jammed into the *kommandant's* back, shoved them both to the door.

"Keep your ears open, Shultz, he said. "This is *very* important. We're going right out that field and take one of those planes. You can tell those mugs out there that if they so much as sneeze, both you and your boss are going to have fine big holes in your back. Get me?"

Shultz grinned crookedly. "Looks like you win, pal," he said. "It's your party from now on."

Molloy reached down on the floor and picked up the map that Shultz had returned.

"The Old Man's going to be glad to see both this thing and you." And when Shultz looked at him questioningly, he said, "Yeah, didn't I tell you? You're coming on back to the 24th."

They went out the door, and the *kommandant* was sputtering frantically. A group of pilots rushed towards them, but at Molloy's prompting, Shultz shouted to them and they veered away.

The three walked slowly towards the nearest Fokker, and Molloy observed that the motors of the planes had just been killed.

He climbed into the cockpit, holding the Luger against the *kommandant's* head, and told Shultz to turn it over. The little man obeyed, and painfully spun the prop. The engine caught immediately, and Molloy motioned him to a place on the wing. Once he was in position, Molloy shoved the *kommandant* aside and gave the Mercedes the gun. The plane leaped off the field, and looking in back of him, Molloy could see frenzied figures trying to get the rest of the planes into the air. But he knew that they'd never catch him now.

HE crossed the lines high up, but hugged the ground as he swept into the field of the 24th. He had seen no planes in the air, but he wasn't taking any chances. He set the crate down and taxied up to a hangar. A crowd headed for him on the run, and when they reached him, shouting at the top of their lungs, he sat silently in the pit and said: "Get that guy to a hospital. He's got a slug in him."

Shultz climbed stiffly from the wing and said, "No hurry. The thing has stopped bleeding."

Rafferty, one of the pilots of 'B'

Flight, hauled himself up on the step.

"You sure did a day's work, Mike. Why don't you ask for a raise?"

Molloy's eyes were cold and lustreless, and he looked at the man as if he'd never seen him before. His mind was on the past—on those many flights that he and McNamara had taken together—on the brawls in which they had indulged. He looked up absently.

"What? What did you say?"

"What the hell's the matter with you?" Rafferty wanted to know. Then he became deeply concerned. "Did you get hit, Mike? Are you all right?"

"I got a crease," Molloy told him. "But it doesn't mean anything. McNamara got hit, though. Did you find the plane?"

Rafferty started to laugh. "That guy! He's—"

Molloy's snarl cut him off. "What the hell's so funny about it, you clown? Haven't you any respect for the dead?"

Rafferty looked at him. "The dead? The—" Then he laughed again.

"You don't mean *dead*—you mean *bed*! That guy thinks he's a sparrow or something. His plane landed in a tree and burned, but Mac didn't have his belt snapped and he was thrown clear. We found him wedged into a tree. He busted two ribs and his nose, but outside of that he's okay."

Molloy hit the ground in one jump and clutched the mans' shoulder.

"You mean he's alive? He's not hurt bad?"

Rafferty nodded.

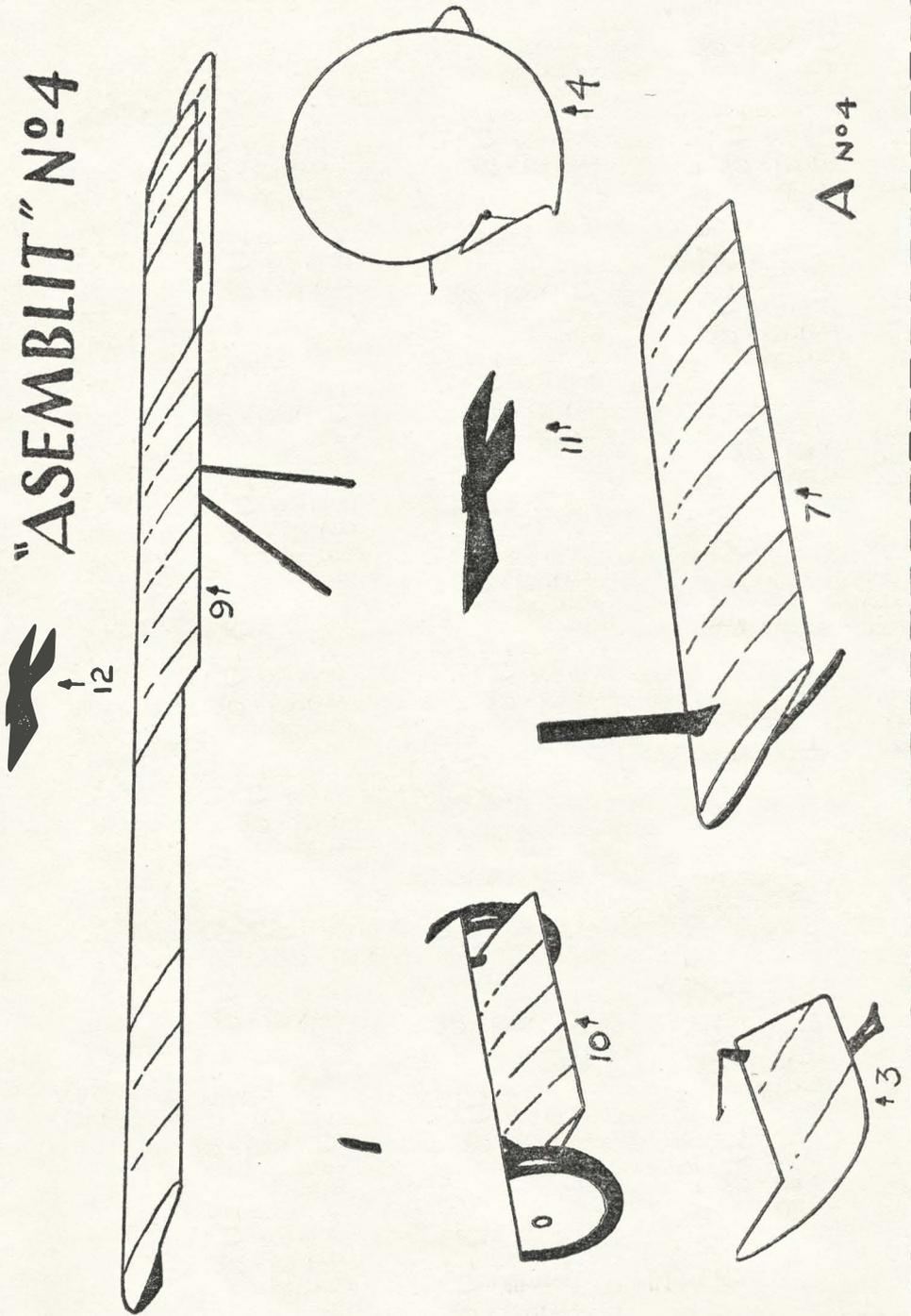
"Sure—on the level. He's raising hell over in the medico's tent—wants a drink—but that's all that's wrong with him."

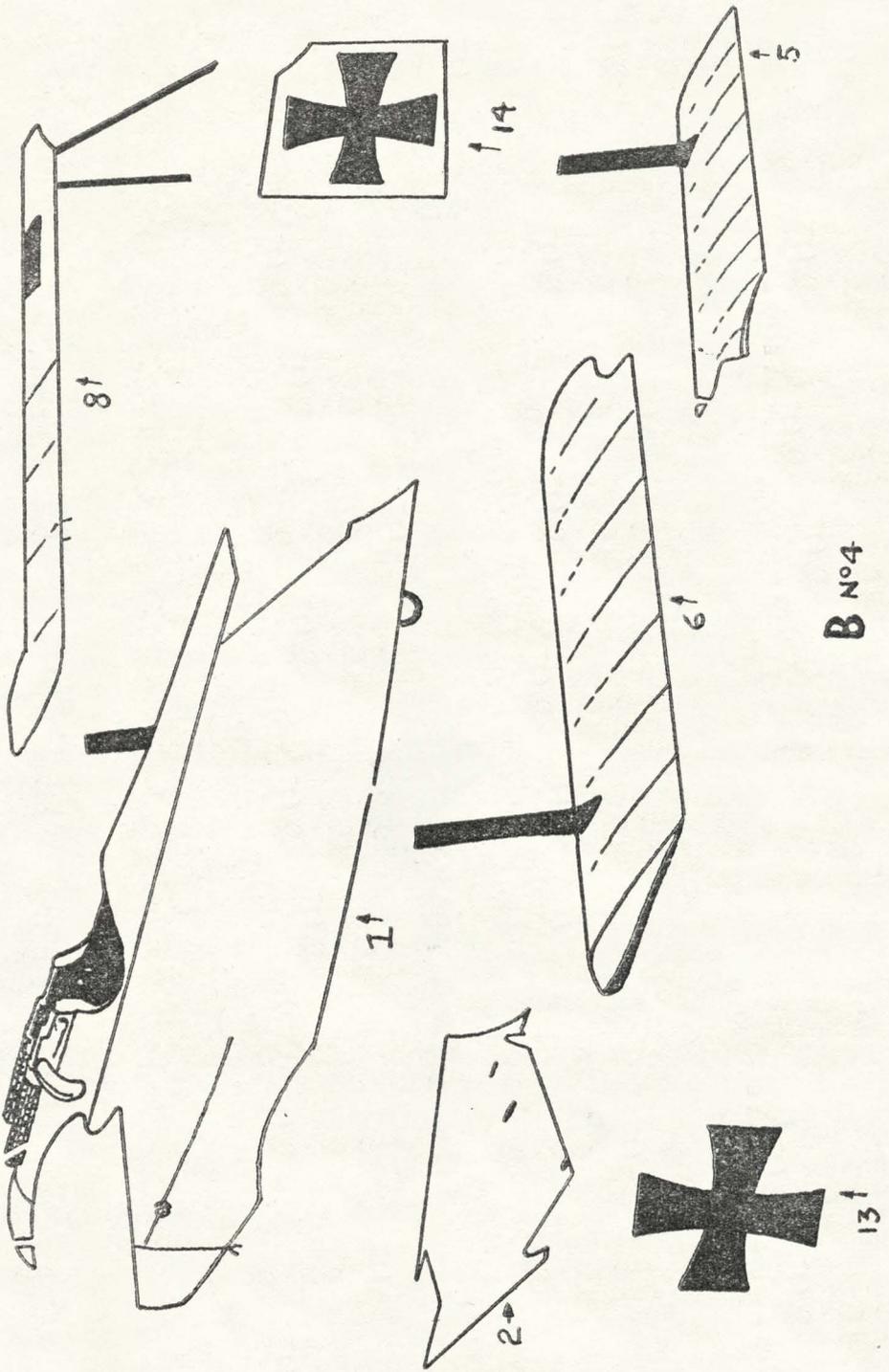
Molloy whirled to the grinning Shultz and picked him up in his arms. He started for the *estaminet* on the run and shouted:

"The drinks are on me again, kid!" Then he stopped, suddenly. "But if you ever pull a stunt like that again, you'll—you'll buy your own beer."

[See page 89]

"ASEMBLIT" N°4





B N°4



Conducted by Nosedive Ginsburg

WELL, my fond squirrels, we are gathered once again in our jolly and intimate little group, and if you will wait for a moment while I roll up my sleeves, I will be happy to rip the wings from any of you punks and let Louie the Lush feed on the remnants of your carcasses. Not pretty words, you say; not pretty words for Commander Ginsburg, the Mighty Monarch of the Air, huh? Well, lads, this is not a day for pretty words, and the drums of war beat loud in the ears of your commander.

Last month, as you remember, we left all the windows open in the hangar, to let out the stink of the Aeronca Aces. Unhappily, the Lush forgot to close them again, for the Aces have flown back. Something terrible has happened! You are familiar, of course, with the strange and ghastly face of Piedra, the Louisiana Mudhen, and you know him for a harmless sky-stooge who was hit across the skull by a whirling prop when he bent over to bite his toenails. (Charlie is forever biting his toenails, and that's why his letters and poems make such silly noise. What the hell can a guy say with his toe in his mouth?)

But let's get back to that open window. Louie the Lush, by the simple process of stirring his brains with a wooden spoon—Louie has a terrific hole in his head, naturally, and it is easy for him to stir his brains—came to the conclusion that a

wide open window needs no glass; that glass is to see through, and anyhow you can see better without it, especially when the glass is stained with the blood of the Aeronca Aces. So Louie calmly eats all the glass and picks his teeth with a bayonet. But Louie is very surprised and also very annoyed to find that he cannot pick his teeth, simply because he lost them all when he last bit the side of the hangar. All this gets very complicated, squirts, so you better hang on!

As everyone in this organization knows, Member Joe Hawkins is, for a time at least, living inside of the Lush. Louie ate Hawkins many months ago, and Joe has been keeping house down there ever since. Well, when the small bits of glass come showering down on Hawkins, poor Joe thinks it's raining. Naturally he reaches for his umbrella and opens that article in great haste. And if any of you punks has ever had an umbrella opened inside your neck where the tonsils hang, you will have a fair idea of how the Lush is feeling today!

It was while Louie was trying to gulp down the open umbrella that this terrible thing I am talking about took place. It flew through the window when the Lush wasn't looking, and we have not set a trap for it, as yet. We have hopes, however, that this will not be necessary, and that this terrible thing will be chased out when Ambrose, the hangar cat, returns.



Dirty Dusty Dowst

Right on this page you sky mice will see the terrible thing that has happened. He is from New York City, the home town of Ginsburg, and it is possible that the great towers of Manhattan will come tumbling down with the story that is about to break. No longer is the peace of the world threatened by the Aeronca Aces and the Ginsburg Legion, founded by Adrian Smith. The newest, and perhaps the most ghastly menace is provided by Dirty Dusty Dowst whose letter follows. Says Dowst:

Dear Stinkburg:

Since that long ago day when I was weaned on a Flit gun, and sprouted wings through my shoulder blades, I have awaited this chance to change the history of aviation. I know all about Adrian Smith and the Ginsburg Legion. It is merely a belch from a guy who swallowed too much gas. As for them Aeronca Aces—let me introduce you to myself and squadron, and you will be glad to bury Piedra in the mud from which he sprang. My picture will attest to my being the clean-cut, truly American type, and I only regret that I have no photo to enclose of my first flight lieutenant, a rough and ready, two-fisted sky hellion by the name of Heavenly Henry.

Heavenly Henry has been busy under my direction in the formation of the ARROW STAFFEL STOOGES, a title that was inspired by Heavenly Henry's suddenly up and drinking three gallons of motor oil. The thing to remember about this organization, Stinkburg, is that we really fly, and can take off the bald head of your old man, Commodore Ginsburg, and make a three-point landing in the belly of the Lush, if necessary.

We are also effective in our long-distance hops, inasmuch as we do not necessarily need fuel for our planes. Heavenly Henry has been known to hang off the back end of an Arrow Sport and propel this nifty little sky craft by the explosions that come from Henry's fiery breath. We are ready for you, Stinkburg, and we mean to enlarge our numbers. For every flying bum enlisted by Piedra, yourself, or your daffy supporter, Adrian Smith, Henry and I can supply ten thousand maniacs, each and every one equipped with an Arrow Sport.

If you have not fled like Piedra with your long beard between your legs, Stinkburg, just give an ear to our battle song:

Free are those birds who roam the skies,
Free as the bilge we shall cast in your eyes.
Piedra beware when the battle rages,
And we meet our foes who stalk these pages.

Aye, and all the Arrow Staffel think
That Piedra and Ginsburg and Adrian stink!
Woe betide the punks who dare
To lodge themselves in the Staffel's hair.

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Dare-Devil Aces

This magazine will have profited
When all you bums are very dead;
When Ginsburg is buried after the raid,
And Heavenly Henry turns the spade!

Henceforth, Stinkie boy, the world will have to reckon with the ARROW STAFFEL STOOGES, but the world will profit by the deal. The skies shall be clear of the Aconca Aces. Piedra will be stuffed with Hawkins in the belly of the Lush, and the Ginsburg Legion will be as cock-eyed as its eminent commander.

I trust that this call to arms by the ARROW STAFFEL STOOGES will bring to the banners of Heavenly Henry and myself, such men as have the interest of aviation at heart.

Get back in the ground, Stinkburg, you bum, and await the wings of Heavenly Henry.

Regards,
Dirty Dusty Dowst.

Nevertheless, punks, Ginsburg's first duty is to cast about the dollars for talent, and if Dirty Dusty Dowst, who lives at number 10 Monroe Street, the slum district of our town, hasn't got talent, then Ginsburg is not the greatest flyer of this or any other generation. This last mentioned fact, of course, is universally accepted. Therefore we must toss Mr. Dowst a pound, five beautiful green backs to rest on his grave. Carry on, you bums; Ginsburg pays off once a month!

PERSONALLY, dear members, the threats of Dirty Dusty Dowst disturb your commander not in the least. The guy has to show something before we let him throw punches at rough, tough Charlie Piedra, and as for mixing insults with the Ginsburg Legion, Dirty Dusty and Heavenly Henry had better return to the safety of the slap-hatch.

Of course, any of you soaring squirts that care to join up with Dirty Dusty are welcome to do so. Simply keep in mind that you have opposed yourself to the Mighty Ginsburg, and that you might just as well have ten thousand feet of altitude and be hanging from the wrong end of a ten cent paper kite.

BUT WAIT a minute! Having taken it on the whiskers with manly fortitude thus far, Commander Ginsburg now brings forth the brave and heartening words of his defender, Flight Leader Adrian Smith of the Ginsburg Legion.

It goes like this:

TO: Commander Ginsburg
FROM: Adrian W. Smith--674 Sixth
Avenue, Salt Lake City, Utah

Commander N. Ginsburg:

Wish to acknowledge receipt of one crisp and crunchy dollar bill, and offer hearty thanks for same.

Our drive for a super-colossal Ginsburg Legion goes on! At the present writing have received communiques from Pennsylvania, Illinois and from within my own state, offering compliment and requesting details.

Will endeavor to have an agent sneak into Buzz Harrison's grass shack in Honolulu, and fill his fountain pen with sea water. This should be easy, as Buzz probably spends most of his time up in a tree throwing coconuts down on the heads of passersby, after the manner of his ancestors. The screwball will never notice the change, so if you receive blank paper from Hawaii, don't be alarmed.

Of course, there is the danger of having to handle anything that he has handled first. but what's that compared to having to read his lousy poetry?

Hoping my staunch support had imbued you with new courage to fight the Aeronca menace. I remain,

Very truly yours,

Adrian W. Smith,

Golden Eagle, Ginsburg Legion.

WELL spoken, Smith, you mighty eagle, and if I hadn't thrown you a fish a month ago, I'd present you with one at this meeting.

But what I can't figure out, squirts, is when you sky maniacs are going to clash. How this war can be continued so that we'll have some real blood on the tarmac. It's Piedra's blood I want, pals, so let me have it in bucketsful.

Getting away from this mass warfare, dear members, I find myself with five bucks to cast to the gaping geese. One of them goes to C. P. Dawson, whose expert opinions come from Florence, Mass.:

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Dare-Devil Aces

Dear Ginsy:
No time for nonsense today. This is merely a suggestion. Why must those maniacs you have around the hangar keep jumping at each other's throats without providing any real action, or doing anything that is genuinely funny. They're lousy! Let me suggest that you give your good money to guys who can actually amuse us. Let's hear from hyenas who can really draw and who know something about flying! Let us have classes in aircraft construction so that we'll get some good out of your lousy department. The magazine's all right. It's the best collection of war-action stories that can be bought for blood or money. Why don't you get rid of those bums, Ginsburg? Why?
Your constant critic,
Charles P. Dawson.

Why, indeed, dear members! All that noble work you speak of, Charlie, would be welcomed by Ginsburg. The trouble is that these hyenas don't want to be skillful or scientific. They want to make noise and have themselves heard, and since they choose to stick knives in Ginsburg, what can your commander do? We still pay off to guys who send in clever poems and drawings, but a real, full-life, untarnished lunatic like Piedra is something to get excited about.

The next bit of cash goes to Member R. H. Brown Jr., P.O. Box 397, Hemp-hill, Texas. Member Brown gives a large portion of atrocious poetry, plus a collection of insults that are monumental. Another buck for a screwy drawing goes

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to Albert Hutchins of Dobbs Ferry, N. Y. Next comes Henry W. Chastain, living at 36 West Seminole, McAlester, Oklahoma. Perhaps Henry is an original Seminole and had his head opened with a tomahawk. I don't know. But he draws silly pictures and writes a dizzy letter. The squirt wins a dollar, anyhow.

The last of the lucky lunatics is that sterling Aeronca Ace, Johnny "Machine Gun" Boyd. Johnny has been one of Piedra's hardest working stooges since the war began. His literary efforts taken together and thrown in the ash can would make a bigger bundle than Louie the Lush with Hawkins inside of him.

So to all of my merry members, a fond adieu. I'll see you bums next month, and I'll be prepared for action! So long!
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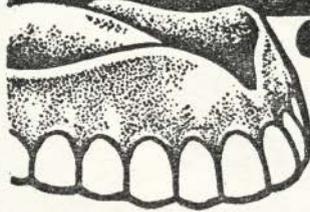
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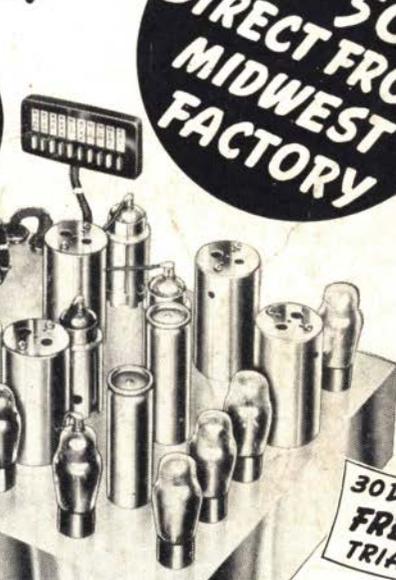
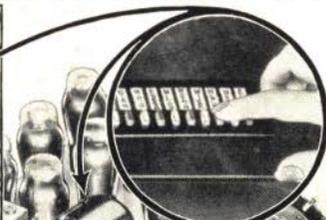
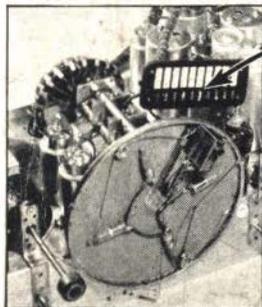
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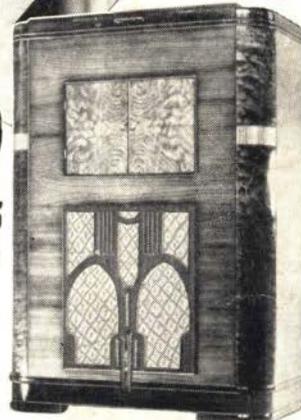
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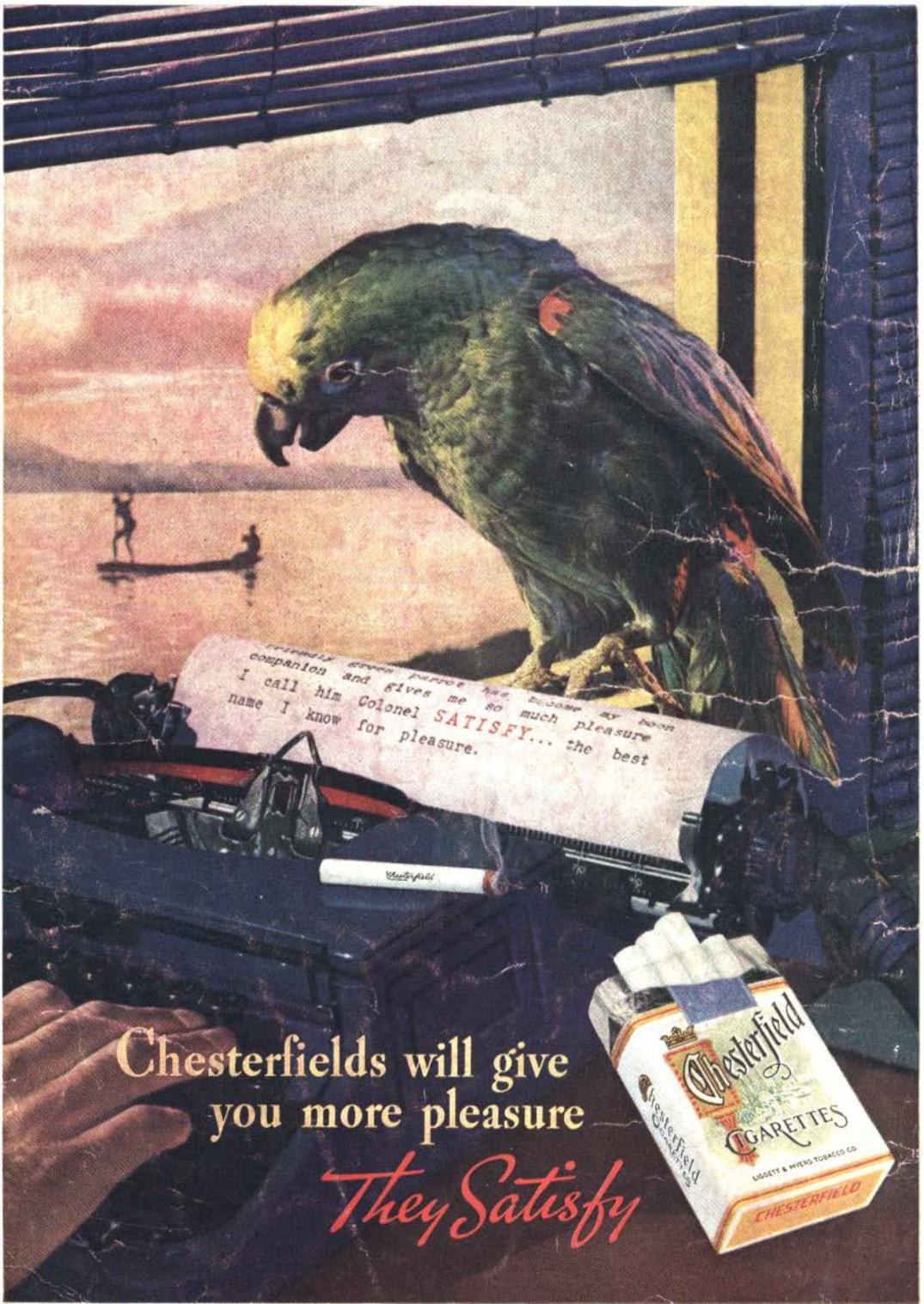


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