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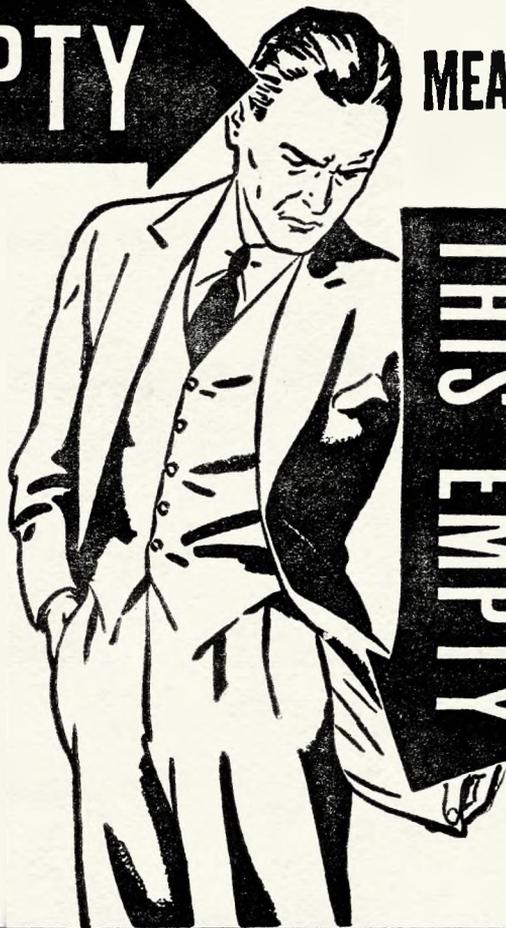
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VOL. 19

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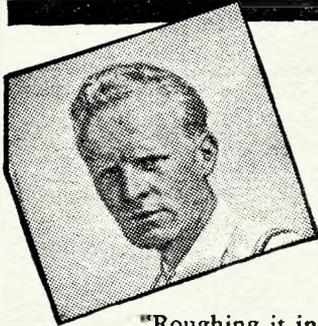


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"We Were Asleep in a Nest of Rattlers!"



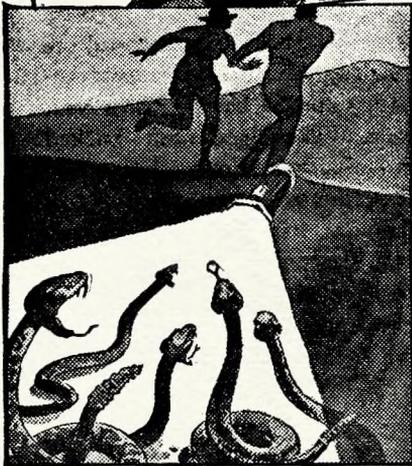
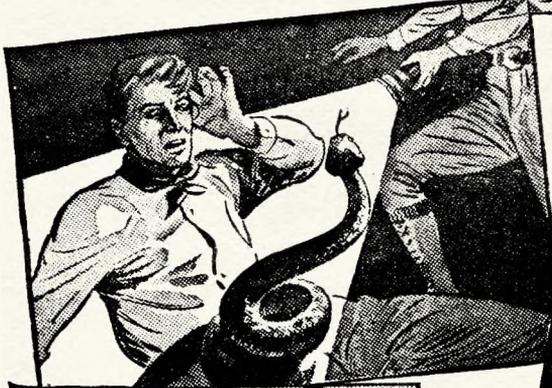
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Low Ceiling

OF ALL the things to which the Air is host today, the greatest of these is rain. Rain makes the flowers grow and puts muscles in the vegetables. Rain is a very wonderful thing, if you can keep it out of your eyes.

We have a friend, a daring soul, who goes around without a hat. He has no fear of the weather, and a gale in the face is a caress from the Gods. The rain drops gently on his head and he is growing bald. It seems it does not do for his hair what we have seen it do for the plants. In winter, the rain, the sleet or the snow, have been known to freeze upon his head, and often he will shake himself like a dog, and produce enough ice cubes to put in a round of drinks. Of course, we may be stretching a point, but he does not like to wear a hat.

Our friend is an Aviator who flies in midget planes, and once, in a moment of recklessness, he took off for Boston without his helmet and goggles. This was contrary to his general practice of keeping them beside him in the pit.

The midget lifted from its Long Island field and spread its wings to the North. The thunder kicked a time or two and the rain came lightly down. Old rain-in-the-face was happy and he blew bubbles back at the storm. The light craft bucked against winds that were not too heavy and its game little motor labored on.

Our friend sat happily through many wet miles and Boston was not so far away. But the thunder kicked again with both its ponderous feet, and the rain came heavily, like bathtubs upside down. The pilot suspected that maybe this was not so good.

The rain drove into his pit and proceeded to drown him like a cat in a tub. Our friend remembered that he liked the rain, so he tried his best to grin. But the lightning thrust a jagged golden finger down and our guy spat out another mouthful of rain.

Through the wet blanket of sky he saw the Boston drome he sought. He didn't get a very good look, but the vague outlines seemed familiar. He dropped down through the ceiling and the rain punched him with a million jabs. His hands were too busy with controls to wipe the rain away. He doesn't recall too clearly what happened until he hit the fence. He awoke with all his bones intact but with most of them very sore. The puddle he sat in became a river and he loudly cursed the rain. His midget plane was a beautiful wreck. The moral of this story is that goggles are better than no goggles; and that the weather is stronger and tougher than midget planes with open cockpits.

Now, while we watch the great Airacudas, the giant Boeings and those other peerless crafts that can spit across continents, we are apt to think but little of the weather. Caution has deserted some of the sky-drunk heroes who fly for the thrill of the thing, and they are apt to forget that they are only flying kites, instead of mighty transports.

Since we are wholly in favor of the great interest in light planes, we must deplore those few who abuse their luck and take chances where the elements are stacked against them.

There is a time for flying and a method of handling these little Sunday crates. Nothing is better for Aviation than a large-scale interest in flying, and the guys who fuss with little engines of their own may well be the air-scientists of tomorrow.

For the lanes of the sky remain to be conquered; there are hazards that have not yet been wholly overcome. Where a great cargo of life hits a mountainside, there is need for research and diligent invention. Each flying disaster should be the one-way road to a flying success. And for the instruments of this success, we must look to those young men who were born with wings on their backs and can't keep out of the sky.

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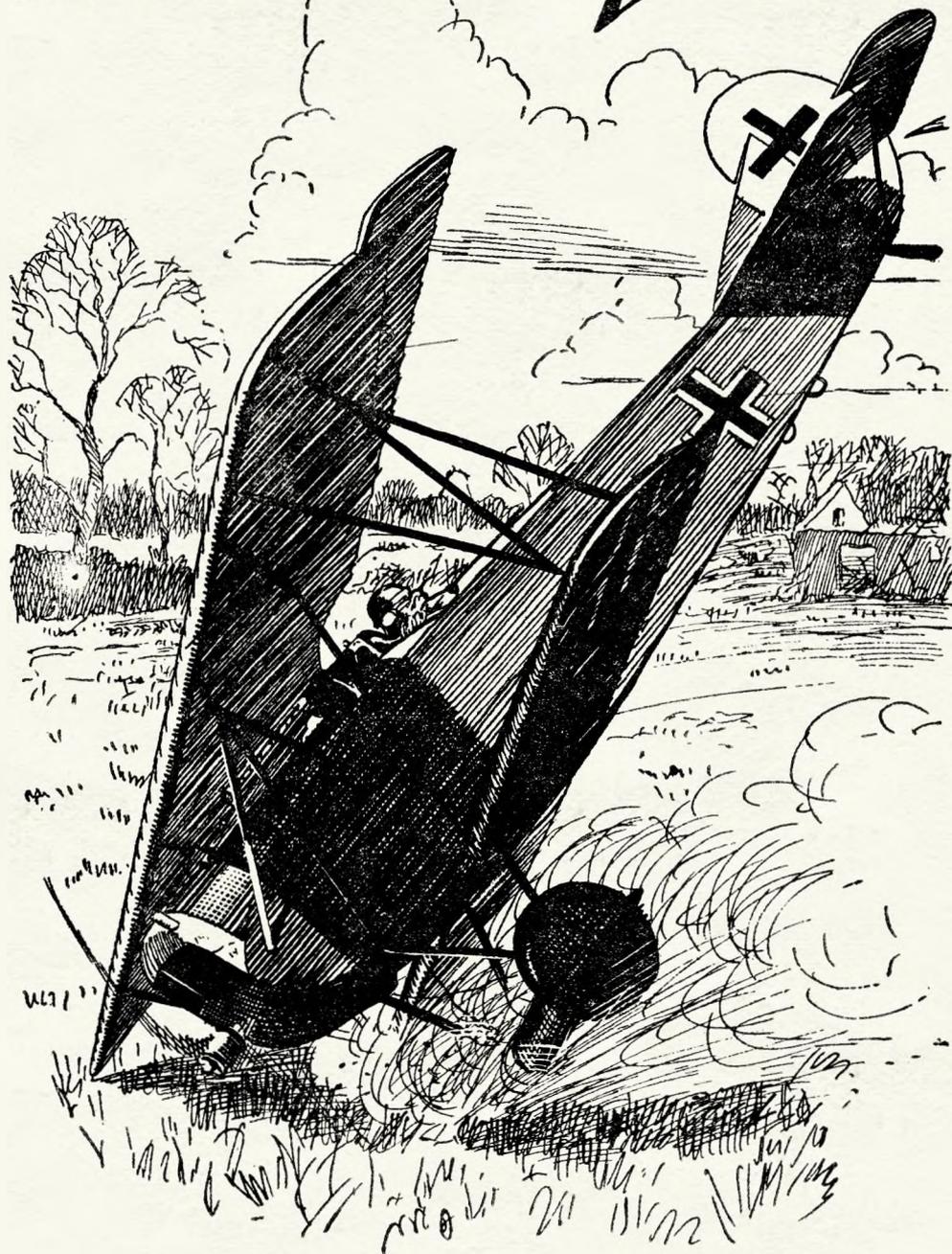
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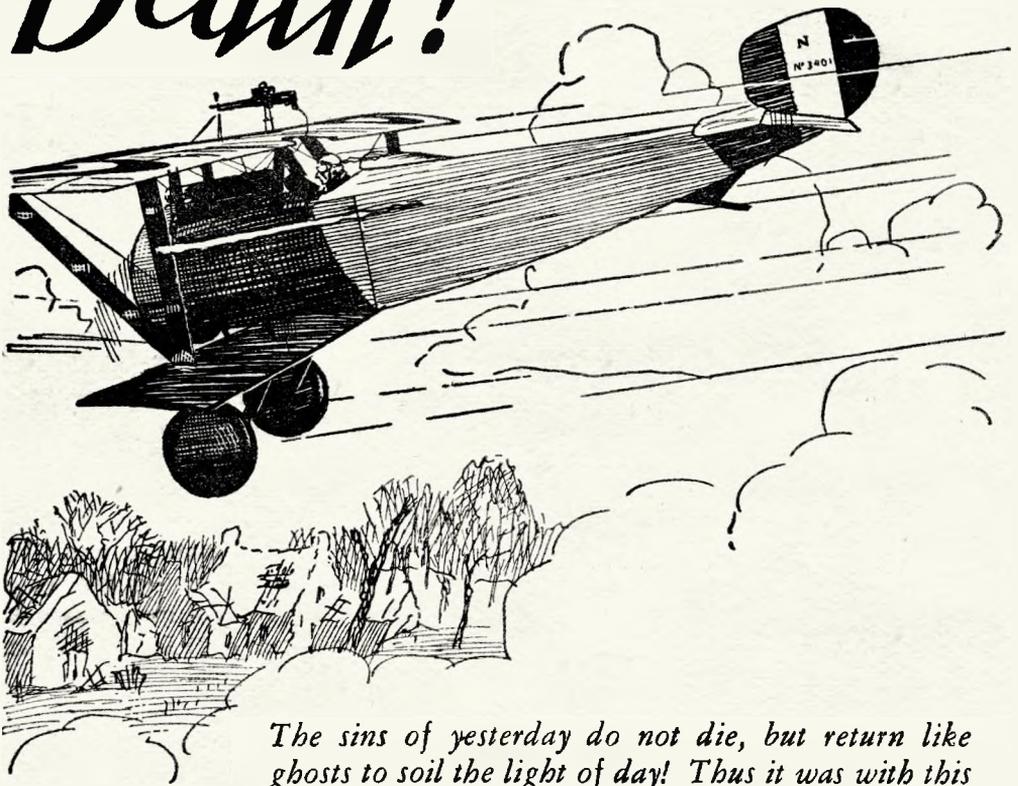
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Death! by O. B. MYERS



The sins of yesterday do not die, but return like ghosts to soil the light of day! Thus it was with this fighting man who tried hard to forget, but who could not lose in the blood of war the darker stains of murder! The guns roar forth with a heavy voice and there is a lasting shriek when men and ships go down to die. Yet all these things grow silent when it is time for Death to Speak!

CHAPTER ONE

The Road to Hell

PETE swished the beer around in his glass and finished it off with a gulp. His companion made a sign to the bartender before Pete could object, and went on talking.

"Hell, it's January already. The war's been going on two and a half—more than two and a half years. If we're going to get in it at all, we'd better get in pretty damned soon."

Pete shrugged. "What's the rush?"

It'll probably run on another two and a half, from the looks."

Eric Ronzell slid his elbow along the bar to lean close, and spoke with great earnestness. "That's where you're wrong. This spring, 1917, is going to see the finish. Everybody says so that knows anything about it. The German army is getting ready for a big push. They'll be in Paris by July, it's a cinch, and then it'll be all over. And won't we feel foolish then? The biggest war in history right across the Atlantic, and we never even heard a shot fired!"

Pete jiggled his glass uneasily. "Yeah,

I know, Eric. I don't want to miss all the excitement, of course. But to go in the Kaiser's army—why, I don't even speak German!"

"Don't worry about that. They're not turning down any volunteers. Besides, I know some people over there; I've got relatives in Berlin, you know. We can fix that up easy enough."

Pete's eyes were beginning to gleam. But still he hesitated.

"But if we get in the German army, and then this country enters the war on the side of the Allies—what then?"

"Don't make me laugh," sneered Eric. "President Wilson will never let the United States declare war. If he did nothing but write notes after the Lusitania, he'll never get in it now. . . . What do you say?"

Pete could feel a warm, tingling sense of excitement rise within him; an exhilaration almost physical, as if he had been drinking something stronger than beer. He was young, red-blooded, eager; ready to plunge into the stream of life. Why wait? He had finished all of his college career but the last term; what was a diploma but a bit of parchment? While he nodded in classrooms, great events might pass him by. The lust for adventure stirred strongly in his veins.

Adventure, however, is a capricious goddess, and does not always respond to the first advances in the hoped-for manner.

"How would we get over there?" mumbled Pete.

Eric clapped him lightly on the shoulder. "That's the stuff! I knew you were a man, not a damned pacifist. . . . Listen. Getting across is the easiest part." Although there was no one else in the room but the bartender, he inched closer so as to speak into Pete's ear. "Why do you suppose I got you to meet me tonight, here in this dive? Right at the foot of the street, alongside of Pier 79, there's

a freighter, scheduled to sail at midnight for Copenhagen."

Pete drew back in astonishment. "Tonight?" he cried.

"Sh-h," warned the other. "Certainly. Why not? You don't need to worry about passage money. We can work our way. Those boats are all short-handed these days. The captain as good as told me it would be all right, if we could get on board. It's the dock police we've got to get past. They're watching for reservists, you know. But that pier is piled high with barrels and crates and everything else. We ought to be able to slip through. Come on."

"But—" stammered Pete. "You said Copenhagen?"

"Yes. Once in Denmark, it won't be hard to get across the border. It's being done every day. I've got money enough with me to take care of incidentals. What else do we need?"

Pete, his mind racing in indecision, had no time to be surprised at his companion's manner. For the last two years he had roomed with Eric, whose most characteristic Teuton trait was the habit of carefully weighing, planning, organizing every action. Yet tonight he seemed to be rushing off into the unknown with the recklessness of a Latin. Or was he?

Pete's pulse raced madly. "By God . . . the war!" he whispered half to himself. Then, "Okay. . . . Let's go."

Less than a minute later they were walking rapidly west along the dark uneven sidewalks of 40th Street. As they neared the bleak cobblestones of Twelfth Avenue, Eric pointed ahead.

"See, that one there," he hissed.

The pier was a huge hump-backed cavern with a small mouth in which dim lights and occasional moving figures could be seen. Hugging its north side, low in the water, lay a steamer camouflaged in dirty gray and black; across the bulge of the stern chunky white letters spelled out

an unpronounceable Scandinavian name.

"Keep away from the entrance," cautioned Eric.

Trying to keep their steps casual, they plodded half a block north before crossing the street, and approached the corner of the pier. Here the usual high fence of steel pickets barred progress forward; one man by himself could never have wriggled around or over. But by giving each other handholds, first from one side and then the other, they swung themselves past that barrier, and stood on the string-piece, a dozen feet above the icy, swirling water.

Feeling their way along the narrow catwalk, Eric stopped by a pass-door in the wall on their left. Ahead was the glare of floodlights and the groan of a windlass, where cargo was still being loaded into a stern hatch. Eric muttered a curse.

"We'll have to get up by the bow, where it's dark," he pointed out. "Let's see if we can get inside."

HOW he picked that lock, Pete couldn't see, but after a few moments the door gave way with a faint creak, and they were inside, crowded between mountainous walls of bales and barrels. They could move only a few feet before they had to climb, but once up close under the rafters, they moved ahead steadily. Clambering over stacked crates, once swinging ape-like from beam to beam, they worked their way unseen out to the river end of the long enclosure.

Here they descended once more to the floor level and by a lucky chance found one of the cargo doors ajar.

"We must be near the bow," whispered Eric. "Shinny up the mooring lines, and the best place to hide is inside a lifeboat."

He edged the door a little farther, just enough to pass his body, and they glided through onto the stringpiece.

"Well, nice night for a swim, ain't it?" said a harsh voice heavy with sarcasm.

Eric recoiled against Pete, who still blocked the opening. Now he perceived why that cargo door had been open; a couple of the dock police had gone out that way a few minutes earlier to take a look along the stringpiece.

"All right, back inside, kiddo, and let's have a look at you."

One of the officers, swinging his loaded billy, went first; then Eric and Pete; the second flatfoot brought up the rear, snickering audibly. Perhaps it was that exasperating snicker, or the way he said kiddo; Pete saw that Eric's face, in the dim light, was white as a sheet. The cop slung Eric by the shoulder back against a stack of steel-bound boxes with unnecessary violence.

"Now let's hear just what the hell you two bozos—"

Pete saw Eric stiffen, clenching his fists, and had a premonition of trouble. So far this was nothing but an escapade; they had broken no law, and were liable for nothing worse than trespass. Why let it get serious. He gestured with his hand, saying quickly, "No, Eric, cut it—" But it was too late. Eric sprang, lashing out like a wild animal.

Things happened then very fast, but in perfect, well-rounded sequence, as if it had all been carefully rehearsed. The first cop side-stepped Eric's rush and lifted his club. Pete reached up and seized it before the blow could descend. The downward thrust of the man's arm jerked the billy from his grasp, leaving it in Pete's. Pete spun round to meet the assault of the second officer just in time to parry with that club a blow that would have put him to sleep on the spot. Eric and his opponent crashed together, and went to the floor in a struggling heap. Pete danced aside, and prepared to defend himself.

He had the billy in his hand, but something warned him not to use it. It was a simple but wicked weapon, about eighteen inches long and loaded with lead near the

tip. A solid blow with such a club could do more than hurt. Pete wasn't anxious to injure anybody; all he wanted was to protect himself and get out of this mess as soon as possible.

So when his own antagonist rushed at him a second time, Pete merely held him off until he could get in a sharp rap on the knuckles. The man emitted a howling cry of pain and dropped the club from his nerveless fingers. Immediately Pete tossed aside his own billy, hoping that this would end matters. But the other man, enraged now beyond reason, charged him like a bull.

He wasn't very big, that officer, but he was tough, and dock experience had taught him something about rough and tumble. Pete had his hands full. They surged and swayed, chest to chest, each clawing for a hold or a blow. Pete knew a bit about wrestling; if he could once get his man down on the floor, he thought, it wouldn't take long to tie him in a knot.

He swung a hooked foot, kicking one leg out from under his opponent. At the same time he hurled his weight sideways. Together they toppled, slowly, fighting for balance. Halfway to the floor Pete twisted sharply, to bring the other underneath. That twist did it.

A thump on the head dazed him for an instant, but he fought off the effects immediately. Then he found that he was pinning to the floor a man who offered no resistance whatsoever. Suspicious, he clamped on an arm-lock, and grunted, "Finished, are you?"

There was no reply. His enemy rolled limply under him, so that his head moved into a faint beam of light. Pete went numb all over. From a great triangular gash oozed blood and what looked like brains!

They had fallen against a stack of crates; Pete's own head had grazed one as he went down. But his opponent's skull must have crashed square against a steel-shod corner, when Pete gave that twist.

Pete recoiled to his knees. His stiff lips, without command from his brain, formed the phrase, "He's dead!" The sound of his voice filled him with horror; he looked around to see if he had been overheard. No. Eric and the other cop were locked in a struggle on the floor, twenty feet away. Pete rose with a jerk.

With his eyes fixed on that face, vacant, staring, ashen, a word flashed across his mind. A single word, which he seemed to see emblazoned in huge black letters, as in a headline. MURDER! It seemed to leap at him, growing larger and larger, repeating itself endlessly, insistently. MURDER! . . . MURDER! . . . His feet began to move.

Once running, panic seized him in its grip. By the very act of running, he confirmed his guilt, and redoubled his hysteria. He had killed a man; he must get away. Quick, get away from here; far away. There was no room in his frantic thoughts for any other idea. Horror, complete and overwhelming, drove him like a scourge.

CHAPTER TWO

Flight

HOW he got off that pier he never could remember afterwards. Those moments were too filled with terror and despair for details to be remembered. He was out on the street, he was a block, two blocks away, still running at top speed. From the corner ahead of him came a call, "Taxi, mister?" and he saw an arm raised.

His impulse was to dash past. But reason began to function. A taxi could travel faster than he could run, and besides, to take it would make his haste appear natural rather than suspicious. He sprang in, saying the first name that came to his mind. "Grand Central!"

The driver got going, and turned into

a broad cross street before he half turned to speak through the open panel.

"What time does your train leave, mister?"

Pete's eyes flitted across the face of a clock in the window of a passing shop. It said ten minutes before eleven.

"Eleven o'clock," he grunted.

"Ah, the Maple Leaf, for Montreal?" said the driver, who apparently knew his timetables. "Don't worry; I'll make it for you."

By the time the cab whirled into a ramp and came to a stop, Pete had caught his breath and to a certain extent collected his wits, though the driving incentive to flee was still strong enough to blot out all other emotions. The driver's words, however, had unwittingly given him a suggestion. Hurrying down the steps into the station, he found that he had just money enough left for a straight fare to Montreal. Ten seconds before the gates closed he dashed through, and slipped nervously into a seat in the only day coach on the train.

He closed his eyes many times that night, but slept not at all. Each time that face floated in front of him, that dead man's face with its awful pallor, its flabby muscles, and its gaping wound right at the hairline. A hundred times he started up, imagining that a hand had been laid on his shoulder, only to wipe the cold sweat from his lip and sink back again, shaking dismally.

"A murderer," he kept muttering to himself, "a murderer," and then looking round fearfully to see if he had been overheard.

He could not drag his mind away from what had happened long enough to give any thought to the future, so when he walked through the cold gray station in Montreal the next morning, tired, sore, hungry, and haunted, he had laid no plans at all. Less than forty cents in his pocket, in a strange city, with not a friend to turn



Pete

to—what was he going to do now? Suddenly his eye was caught by a brightly colored poster on the wall; a recruiting poster.

He stopped, read it through once, then a second time. In those few seconds he made up his mind. What better way for a man to lose himself, to submerge his identity? He hurried to the address given at the bottom of the poster. Yet even then, at the last minute, so dazed was he still by disaster that he nearly made a fatal mistake. He almost gave his name as Frazier F. Peters. In fact, he had said, "Peters," in reply to the sergeant's inquiry, before he realized his danger.

"No, that's my first name," he said hastily. "Peter, yes. My last name? Er—Frayne. Peter Frayne, that's it."

The recruiting sergeant wrote it down with stolid calm.

It was the next morning, en route to Halifax, that he bought a newspaper; the last newspaper he was to see for a long time. He had to force himself to hunt the pages for the dreaded New York headline. At last he found it, a brief paragraph on an inner page.

'Dock Brawl Ends In Death,' it said. He steadied his shaking hand and read swiftly. One marine police officer had been found dead, another, rushed to the hospital, was still unconscious. No arrests had been made, but, it ended, "the police have certain clues to the identity of the assailants, and expect to take prompt action."

What did that mean? Had they questioned Eric? No, it said no arrests. What did they know, then? What *could* they know? His rising panic suddenly changed to scorn. They knew nothing, probably, and made statements like that simply to frighten him. That was it. He folded the newspaper carefully and dropped it in a trash can, deciding that the less he looked at newspapers the better off he would be.

IN JULY of 1918 the 16th American Pursuit Squadron was on a drome at Gagneville. That location had been originally chosen for two reasons. First, because it was fairly close to Paris, making it easy for the Air Service bigwigs in the Avenue Montaigne to keep in close touch with things. Second, because it was a long way from the Front. For at the time of its choosing, it must be remembered, American aviation and American pilots were still an unknown quantity. Very few squadrons, as such, had been organized, and the individual flyers had yet to prove themselves. "We'll break them in gradually," said the Allied chiefs, "by keeping them at a safe distance, where they can absorb some experience without getting into trouble."

That second consideration, however, was soon knocked cock-eyed by the enemy. The German advance that started in March continued through April, lagged in May, but swept on in June, until Gagneville, instead of being far in the rear, was hardly a dozen kilometres from the Front, and the green, half-trained Americans found themselves being tested in the

fierce inferno of almost daily combat.

The C. O. of the 16th was, on paper, Major Wagner, a regular army officer who had never been off the ground but who knew how to administer paper work and discipline. The real squadron commander, the man who organized the patrols, taught combat tactics, instructed replacements and led them into battle was, strangely, a Canadian. He had been transferred to them the last week in June from 80 Squadron, R.A.F. His name was Captain Peter Frayne.

Pete had not reached this point without passing through a year and a half of torturous hell. Crossing as a private in a machine-gun battalion, chance had hustled him directly into active service on the Somme. At first he didn't care much whether he lived or not; among his comrades this attitude was taken for a gallant disregard of danger, and his promotions came rapidly. Corporal, sergeant, then commissioned subaltern on the field; a wound, a decoration, and a transfer put him in the flying corps. Back on the Front, that same cold courage proved just as effective in the air as on the ground; his record grew. When it reached six, he became a first lieutenant and a wearer of the D.S.O. Two months later, after three more victories and a spell in the hospital, they had transferred him as a captain and liaison instructor to this fledgling American outfit.

There were times in those eighteen months when Pete almost succeeded in forgetting. Almost, but not quite. It was the quiet moments that were the worst. When he was enjoying a well-earned rest in billets, perhaps, that face would rise up before him when his eyes were closed, the ghost of tragic horror, the reminder of the bitter despair in which his life was steeped.

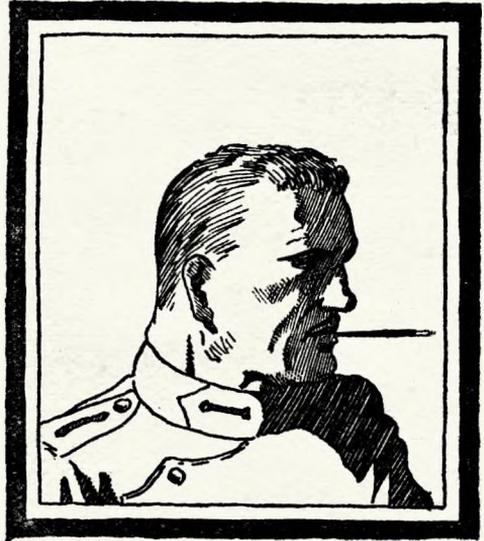
Once, when a general read his name aloud, with several complimentary phrases, and then pinned a bit of bronze

and bright ribbon to his chest, he smiled crookedly. His thoughts were as warped as his smile. "Frazier Peters kills a man, and instantly becomes a hunted, haunted criminal. Yet Peter Frayne can kill a man—many men. He becomes a hero, to be decorated and admired. How come?" It would have been difficult to answer him, had he spoken aloud. But he didn't.

Pete swivelled round in the narrow cockpit to cast a look over his shoulder. Behind him four other Nieuports dogged his path across the early morning sky. Dogged his path, but without hugging his tail like leeches. His own instructions. "Always leave yourself enough room for a turn in any direction. Never know when you may need it in a hurry. Don't worry about a pretty V; do a little essing, enough to look straight back. Each guy is expected to watch the sky behind him, and not depend on the leader to do it for him."

Yes, they were doing all right for novices. Not bad pilots, these youngsters turned out by the training schools at Issoudun and Tours and Foggia. All they needed was experience. And more experience.

His eyes came to the front, and the muscles in his neck jerked taut. Astonishing how quickly a formation of planes could materialize out of empty distance when the combined speed of approach was well over two hundred miles an hour.



Eric

There they were, headed straight toward him, on a level several hundred metres lower. Fokkers, as he recognized immediately. His second look noted their direction, type of formation, and the best angle of approach.

His wrist began a movement with his stick. Then he checked himself abruptly. For a moment he had almost forgotten that these were rookies behind him. He scowled, and half turned in his seat. Four green novices, and there were eight Boches in that formation. Now if he only had some of those Canucks from R.A.F. 80—



NEXT MONTH

We are happy to announce William Hartley's latest and greatest story of the airways—A WARRIOR'S WINGS! —which shall appear in the next issue of this magazine. A Warrior's Wings are hard enough to earn and harder still



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May Issue—On Sale March 25.

With an impatient jerk he completed the movement, and his ship curved sharply. He was muttering under his breath. Let 'em learn by fighting. A man never found himself by sitting up above and watching somebody else do it. Experience was one thing that could not be handed to a fellow ready-made. Only with the hot stink of powder smoke in his nostrils, the murderous pound of machine guns in his ears, and perhaps the sear of lead in his flesh did a man become a veteran—or a name on a wooden cross.

Yet sixty seconds later he had his qualms. His fledgling patrol had followed him eagerly enough, to plunge boldly into the whirl and clamor of a savage dogfight. By directing his opening thrust at one foe, and then abruptly switching to another, Pete had drawn first blood, sending a Fokker lurching into a tight spin with a dead hand on its stick. But then numbers began to tell.

The Yanks were in difficulty. Pete, trying to be everywhere at once, could not stick with one antagonist long enough to down him. One Nieuport, caught in a vicious cross-fire, lost half of its tail surfaces. It fluttered earthward, half spinning, half falling, doomed to a fatal crash. Another, pressed by two Fokkers, was forced into an unending spiral; its frantic bursts wasted themselves inaccurately.

Pete ground his teeth. Perhaps he should have waited until he found combat on more even terms.

He caught sight of a faint trail of smoke. Following it with his eye, he saw that another Nieuport was in trouble.

Pete wrenched his stick, and his own ship cartwheeled across the sky. Recklessly he hurled himself to the assistance of his harried comrade. His first long-range burst merely broke up the German infighting, but his second slammed into dark-hued fabric, and one assailant curved downward trailing a death-plume.

He caught another wheeling off, perhaps for a moment's respite. He gave it

a hatful of steaming lead instead. It ducked into a dive; he pursued relentlessly. R-r-rip . . . pause . . . r-r-r-rip. His bursts dogged its every turn, driving it lower and lower. At last it had to turn and face him. After a lightning plunge and half turn, he struck home with fatal accuracy, braving a desperate hail of steel to do it. His tracers turned that Fokker into a roaring inferno, but in return his windshield was turned into a sieve.

He zoomed away and looked up. As if by magic the dogfight had not only ended, it had disappeared. Of the total of thirteen planes that had joined battle a few short minutes before, he now saw exactly two beside his own. A Nieuport limped off, low down against the carpet, reeling unsteadily. Higher up a single Fokker fled.

Pete narrowed his eyes and looked again. If that Fokker was really fleeing, it was fleeing the wrong way. It was headed straight into Allied territory. Pete began to climb after it.

That was not uncommon. To get directions twisted in the course of a furious dogfight was exceedingly easy. Perhaps he could cut that Jerry off before the fellow discovered his mistake. Keeping well behind until he was at the same level, Pete had no trouble in doing precisely that, for the Fokker never once swerved. Then, with wide open throttle, Pete's Nieuport slashed in to the attack.

The actions of that enemy pilot confirmed Pete's suspicions immediately. He appeared to think himself safe over Germany, where he had only to land to avoid peril; he also seemed to be fed up with battle. He hardly resisted Pete's assault at all, merely dodging bursts without attempting to return them, and gave up altitude as if it cost nothing. In a few minutes the Fokker was driven down close to the ground; after Pete's next smoking volley its motor was cut, and it glided shamelessly toward an open expanse of gray, gas-poisoned pasture.

Pete's lips twisted wryly. A victory, yes; but a tame one. Not the sort he relished. He circled, watching. The field was fair, and the Fokker made a good landing, but at the last minute one wheel met a stone, or some minor obstruction. The ship slewed in a *cheval de bois*, and folded up on one wing.

Pete's first impulse was to chuckle, and fly on. But then he hesitated. Looking down, he saw no sign of movement in the neighborhood. That field was far from any communication trenches or woods where troops might be bivouacked; there seemed to be no doughboys in sight. That German pilot might be pinned in his cockpit, wounded, bleeding to death. Enemy or no enemy, he was a human being.

Pete's landing was quick and smooth; when the Nieuport rolled to a stop he leaped out. Running toward the misshapen wreck of the Fokker, he could hear violent curses in German coming from under the crumpled cockpit. Yes, just as he thought, the right wing-spar had splintered and jabbed into the cockpit, jamming the pilot in the seat. With only a quick glance into the tangle, he put his shoulder under the middle of the spar and heaved.

"There!" he grunted. "Quick now, roll out."

Writhing loose, a man rolled out. The spar settled back with a crunch as Pete let it slip. His jaw dropped in astonishment.

Under a black leather flying coat that pilot wore, not the field-gray of the German army, but breeches and tunic of American khaki. But when he lifted off his goggles and looked up, Pete's astonishment froze into utter amazement and his heart seemed to stand still.

He was looking at Eric Ronzell.

Pete could neither move nor speak. Eric found his voice first.

"I'll be damned!" he blurted. "The fortunes of war, eh?"

Pete could only mutter hoarsely, "Eric . . . you!"

"Yes, it's me, in the flesh." The other man tried to grin, but kept looking about him uneasily. "Let's get away from here, shall we?"

Pete gripped his arm. "But you—tell me what has happened to you! How do you come to be—here?"

CHAPTER THREE

Wings of Yesterday

ERIC seemed to have difficulty finding words, as if he was trying to think fast before he committed himself. "Here? Well, I—I was flying. Before, I mean. Before I was captured. I was shot down and taken prisoner, you see. By the—the Boches about a month ago. Then I escaped, and stole a ship; that Fokker. So here I am. Yes, I used to be with the—



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the 67th. It was a swell outfit."

"I don't mean that," exclaimed Pete. He had completely forgotten the present; the war, uniforms, planes, everything. The sight of Eric's face had carried him back instantly to that night, eighteen months before, as if it were yesterday. "I mean on the dock in New York, that night. What happened after I killed the watchman?"

Pete was too upset to notice the other man's strangeness of expression, the way he gaped. "The watchman?" repeated Eric blankly.

"He was some kind of policeman, wasn't he? God knows I didn't mean to kill him. We fell together, and he crushed his skull against a case. I could see the hole in his head plainly; I still see it in my dreams." He put his hands over his eyes, and shuddered. Then he controlled himself, and went on to tell how he had fled swiftly to Canada and enlisted in the army there, changing his name.

"Mine is no longer Eric, either," was the reply. "Garrick, I call myself; Garrick Smith. I did the same thing you did, that night. Beat it as fast as I could go. Lay low out west for a while, and then got in the army after the States declared war. Been over in France about a year now. But listen, Pete, we'll have plenty of time to talk about things. Let's get moving, shall we? Maybe I'd better stop at your field for a while, till I get straightened out. I've got no papers, you see; they took away my identity card, over there, and some of these M.P.'s might try to get tough with me."

"Certainly," agreed Pete. "I can put you up at Gagneville, of course. Let's go look for the nearest road; I think it's this way."

Pete explained the location of his drome while they tramped across half a mile or so of deserted country. Arrived at the first road, he stopped a truck, asked some questions, and then put Eric on the seat with orders to the driver about where

to let him off. Then Pete returned to his Nieuport, took off, and flew home.

The distance was six or eight miles; naturally Pete arrived first. After checking up on the casualties from the last patrol, he went into his quarters just behind operations office to wait for the friend of his past who had turned up so miraculously. Sitting on his cot dragging at a cigarette, he remembered what Eric had said about the outfit he used to be with. Pete had never heard of the 67th, but if it was on the Front it wouldn't be hard to locate.

He picked up the telephone on the box by the head of the cot. "Get me the 67th Aero Squadron." There was a delay of several minutes. Then a gruff operator told him, "You'll have to put that call through the Pontoise central; they're over that way somewhere."

Surprised, Pete asked for a line. Pontoise was the other side of Paris, and a long way from the Front. What would an outfit that had once been on the lines be doing way down there?

The connection took nearly fifteen minutes, and then wasn't very clear. Pete had to repeat his own name three times.

"You the C.O.? . . . Fine. I've got good news for you. A pilot you lost about a month ago just got back across the lines this morning. He was a prisoner, but he got away. His name is Garrick Smith."

"What was that name?"

Pete repeated it, and then went on to tell how he had forced the Fokker to earth before discovering the identity of its occupant.

"Would you mind spelling out that first name, Captain?"

Pete spelled out both names, letter for letter.

"There's something screwy," said the voice at the other end of the wire. "We've got no Garrick Smith here with the 67th. I've never even heard of a man by that name. You say he's a pilot?"

"Hell, yes. I've said it three times. Pilot: p-i-l-o-t. Get it?"

A couple of minutes later Pete hung up, puzzled and annoyed. Of course he might have made a mistake, misunderstood what Eric said. When Eric jumped off a truck, nearly an hour later, and walked into operations, Pete led him at once into his quarters and closed the door behind them. After a few remarks Pete offered him a cigarette, asking casually, "What squadron did you say you were with, Eric?"

"The 67th," was the reply. "Way over near Toul."

Pete said nothing for so long that finally Eric asked, "Why?"

"Odd that a man should forget the number of his own squadron, isn't it? After only a month, too."

"What do you mean?" said Eric sharply.

"I called the 67th on the telephone, while I was waiting for you. They don't know any Garrick Smith, never had such a name on the roster. In fact, they don't have any pilots at all. They've never been on the Front. The 67th is a service squadron, and does nothing but overhaul motors in the repair park at Sault, near Pontoise."

You could have cut the silence with a knife. Pete was standing near the door; near enough to reach it first. The other man was sitting on the end of the cot, the cigarette in his fingers. The smoke rose in a straight column, without a waver, and made a little cloud up against the ceiling. The column broke into pieces when he shrugged.

"It looks like you've guessed, doesn't it?" he said calmly.

Pete looked him steadily in the eye. "You're pretty brave, Eric, aren't you? You don't seem to be afraid."

Eric's lip curled slightly. "No," he said. "I'm not afraid."

"No, I don't believe you are," nodded

Pete. "You were never afraid of things, the way I was. You always managed to get out from under, didn't you? But this time you won't."

Eric was almost scornful. "You think I won't?"

Pete's eyes hardened. "We used to be friends, Eric. Pretty good friends, too. But friendship won't stretch to cover anything like this, you know. It's Intelligence, isn't it? What you fellows call Wilhelmstrasse. I can guess it all without your telling me. You got away on that Danish boat, that night, before the business on the dock was discovered. You've been in the German army ever since, flying, and learning how to be a spy. Perhaps you've even been in France before this time, on your dirty work. Am I right?"

Eric smiled coolly. "Your guesses are very interesting, Pete."

"I don't have to guess the color of the uniform you're wearing," retorted Pete coldly. "That makes you eligible for a firing squad, without any further evidence, doesn't it?" He took out another cigarette and lighted it, to puff nervously, but made no other move.

"There's the telephone," remarked Eric casually. "There must be M.P.'s nearby. Are you afraid to use it?"

Pete's brow darkened. "No," he said harshly, "I'm not afraid." He stepped forward and reached for the instrument.

"Wait," cried Eric sharply. "You're not going to turn me in."

"No?" growled Pete. "Why not?"

"Because if you do, I will have something to tell them, myself."

AT FIRST Pete didn't understand him. He stood scowling at the man on the cot, his hand paused in mid-air. Then the significance of the words sank in, and the blood drained from his face. He seemed to shrink inside his clothes, and his eyes glazed like those of a man who has been hypnotized. Words formed in

his mind, but clogged in his throat, so that he uttered no sound.

"Why not?" said Eric quietly. "They're always looking for a murderer, you know. They say that the law never forgets. Whether they believe what I tell them or not, they'll investigate, and that will be enough." With deliberate mimicry of Pete's phrases he added, "Army service hides a lot of petty crooks, no doubt, but it won't stretch to cover up a murderer, you know."

Pete could feel the jaws of the past closing on him like a vise. Yet somehow he was not surprised. It was as if he had known all the time, all during these eighteen months of suspense, that this would happen some day. His own past was something a man could never really get away from. He nodded stiffly.

"Yes," he said softly. "I guess you're right, Eric."

"Of course." Eric carefully ground his cigarette under his heel. "I'm sure we'll get along beautifully. Just like old days, eh, Pete? You mustn't let things worry you. Nothing will happen, nothing at all, as long as I'm all right." He laughed shortly. "It's nice to think that you'll be looking out for my safety, Pete."

Pete eyed him darkly, but said nothing.

"Of course," said Eric brightly, as if the thought had just occurred to him, "of course you might kill me. You killed a man once. But I don't think you will."

Pete's fingers clenched and unclenched restlessly. He shoved his hands in his pockets. "No," he said, "I don't suppose I will."

Eric was smiling. "I know you very well, don't I, Pete? It's very nice. But now how about a bite to eat? I'm famished. And it will be pleasant to meet your comrades. Perhaps you'd better not mention where I came from. I'm just a friend of yours—an old friend—who has a leave, and came to spend it with you."

Pete nodded sullenly, and opened the

door. There was nothing else to do.

He didn't see much of Eric for the rest of that day. After the round of introductions, Eric spent some of his time in operations office, studying with great interest the bulletins on the board, and the rest of it in the pilot's barracks. He had plenty of personality, Eric did, when he wanted to use it, and had no trouble making friends. With a perfect command of English, he was a good talker, and an even better listener. It was this second trait that not only increased his popularity, but stood him in good stead now.

His subtle ability to capture confidences was demonstrated forcibly that very evening by Jim Carhite, of B Flight.

"Say, Pete," he said. "This fellow Garry Smith; he's a hell of a good egg, isn't he? Why can't we get him transferred to the 16th?"

Pete ground his teeth and tried to control his expression.

"Yes. I'll see what I can do, Jim. Leave it to me."

Slipping out of the crowded mess, Pete walked down to the *bistro* in the village, bought a bottle of cognac, and hurried back. Locking himself in his room, he opened the bottle and poured out a full tumbler. But then he dropped his head in his hands, and an hour later the glass still stood there on the box, untouched.

No, it wouldn't help to get drunk. Not that way could he escape the trap that Fate had laid for him. A few hours of stupor and blank forgetfulness, yes. But when he awoke the same desperate, intolerable situation would still be waiting to confront him. Nothing could change that; at least nothing that he could do. Yet he *had* to do something. To sit idly by was unbearable. A thousand thoughts pursued themselves through his tortured mind. Every thought started out with, "What if—" and ended up—nowhere.

It was dawn before he closed his eyes in utter exhaustion, and only a few hours

later when he was jerked awake by a sergeant.

"Sorry, sir. The first patrol has gone, yes. An hour ago. But it's about that friend of yours, Lieutenant Smith. He said he was to have a ship to use, and I thought I'd better ask you first."

Pete sat up, muttering angrily. "Why, the crazy—" Then he caught himself. The strings of hell were simply closing about him a little tighter, that was all. There was nothing he could do about it. He dared not even wriggle.

"Yes, that's right," he managed to say, stiffly. "I told him he could take up a Nieuport. Let's see, which one is idle?"

After a moment the sergeant said, "Number 19 is in shape, now. Lieutenant Wagner won't be back from hospital for several days."

"All right. Let him fly Number 19."

Sidling toward the door, the sergeant's glance fell on the cognac bottle, and his eyes betrayed his surprise. After he was gone, Pete got up, recorked the bottle, and hid it in the bottom of his trunk. As he was dousing cold water from a canvas bucket over his head, he heard the roar of a single motor from out on the tarmac. A minute later the plane took off, passed over the roof, and the roar of its exhausts became a hollow drone in the distance. Pete groaned.

For the next few days Pete was, outwardly, the same as ever. He moved about the field, giving orders and advice, he appeared regularly at mess, he led the usual patrols, and he slept—at least he disappeared into his quarters at night. But inwardly he was in a continual agony of fear and suspense.

What was going to happen? What was Eric trying to do? What was he doing even now. To the first two questions Pete could frame no sort of surmise whatsoever. As for the third, Eric seemed to be doing nothing startling. He hob-nobbed with the pilots, he poked around the hang-

ars, and he spent considerable time in operations office, even offering to help Sergeant Donahue with his paper work. Rather to Pete's puzzlement, he did not take the plane up again for two whole days.

On Tuesday another American squadron, the 84th, moved in, taking over the hangars and barracks on the other side of the field. This was a newly organized outfit, with green pilots fresh from Issoudun and Orly; only the flight leaders were experienced men, transferred from other sectors. But they were slated to start patrols immediately; the situation on the Front cried out for every available plane. Until they could get their office staff organized, their orders and flying schedules were being gotten out in the operations office of the 16th.

Just before five o'clock on Wednesday, Pete, coming in from a short patrol, entered the office to make his entry in the log. Eric was there, as well as Sergeant Donahue; the sergeant was muttering to himself and pawing through the papers on his desk.

"I thought I made four copies of that, damn it," he mumbled. "Two for us, and two for the 84th."

Eric, who seemed to be helping him hunt, said, "I saw you take them out of the typewriter, sarge. I'd swear you only had three."

"What's that?" asked Pete, looking up.

"Flight orders for tomorrow," replied the sergeant.

Pete glanced sharply at Eric. Eric met his gaze with a perfectly blank countenance, but Pete could guess immediately what had happened to that fourth copy. He had to bite his lip to keep still.

After five minutes of search the sergeant gave up. "Nuts. I'll have to rattle off another sheet, I suppose. Well, here goes."

Eric loitered for a few moments, then strolled out on the tarmac. Pete, finishing

his log, stepped into his quarters to wash up. Ten minutes later he heard the throaty clatter of a starting motor, which rose to a crescendo and then sank to a steady hum as the plane it belonged to took off. He moved to the window and peered upward. Yes, just as he suspected. It was Nieuport Number 19.

It was easy enough to guess that Eric had taken that copy of tomorrow's flight orders with him to drop somewhere on the other side of the lines. What personal message he might deliver with it, Pete could not guess, nor how much good the schedule by itself might be to the German tacticians. Merely to know the exact disposition of two of the less important squadrons on one day didn't seem so vital. Still, great battles sometimes hinged on insignificant actions.

CHAPTER FOUR

Guts and Glory

WHEN Eric returned, nearly an hour later, Pete's fears were heightened. Eric's expression was so smug, so pleased, and at the same time so excited; he had the look of the cat who has discovered the hidden cream jug. But it was not until midnight that Pete's anxiety was brought to a focus.

He came awake abruptly out of an uneasy slumber. The luminous hands of his wrist watch overlapped each other on the stroke of twelve. The room was pitch black; there was not a sound from the tarmac outside. For a moment he wondered what had awakened him. Then he heard it. The low, ominous rumble of artillery, far off, and yet quite plain, like the roll of thunder along a distant mountain. And yet not like thunder, because it was continuous, unbroken, although made up not of one sound but of thousands. When he swung his bare feet to the floor, he could feel the faint vibration in the

planks. He knew what was happening.

A barrage, and a heavy one. German, without a doubt. It was the next dramatic step of the drive that had started in the spring; the drive that needed only one more decisive victory to surround Paris. That meant a big day tomorrow; a savage attack, desperate resistance; a battle that might decide the war. And that battle might easily turn on a dozen typed sentences on one sheet of paper.

Pete slept no more that night, though he did not leave his quarters. He heard the pilots go down to mess in the morning, but he did not follow them, nor did he appear on the tarmac when the first patrol took off. It was seven-thirty when, unshaven, haggard, wild-eyed, he appeared in his doorway and spoke harshly.

"Sergeant! Find Garrick Smith and send him here at once!"

It took the sergeant fifteen minutes to accomplish his errand. When Eric came in, Pete closed the door behind him and looked at his watch. He wasted no words.

"In a quarter of an hour it will be eight o'clock. If you aren't gone by then, I'm going to call your bluff."

Eric lost none of his self-possession. "My bluff?"

"I can't stand it," said Pete bluntly. "I won't stand it. It's finished, as far as I'm concerned. I'm not covering you up any longer. Because you used to be my friend, I'm giving you fifteen minutes warning. If you're still here at eight o'clock, you'll be a prisoner under guard."

For a moment Eric appeared upset. His mouth hardened in an ugly line, and his eyes flickered ominously. But then he shrugged, and the snarl changed to a slow smile.

"All right, Pete. If you're sure that's what you want, I'll be real sorry to go; I was beginning to feel very much at home here. Your hospitality has been most generous, I assure you. But all good things must come to an end sometime, I

suppose. *C'est la guerre*, eh, my friend?"

His easy sarcasm only made Pete wince.

"By the way, I'd like to use your phone once more."

Pete made a curt gesture of assent. Eric stepped softly across the room and lifted the receiver. To the operator he said, "Connect me with Holyoke 44." The exchange name and number meant nothing to Pete, but he noticed that the connections were quickly established.

"Holyoke 44? I want to talk to the officer in charge of civil crime investigations." There was a pause of but a moment. "Hello; who is this? . . . Colonel Fygard? All right, colonel. Listen closely. Never mind who I am. I'm giving you some information; you'd better write down some notes. . . . Ready? Date, January 14th, 1917. Place, Pier 79, North River, New York. Time, between eleven and midnight. A couple of U. S. Secret Service men were watching that pier for reservists. They were attacked by two—"

The cold horror that gripped Pete like a clammy hand was paralyzing him. He could neither move nor speak, though it was now perfectly plain what Eric was doing. A few more words, and it would be forever too late. His doom was being sealed before his eyes. He shook himself, and took a step forward.

"No!" he croaked. "You devil! . . . You wouldn't—"

Until he found himself looking into the muzzle, he had not known that Eric was carrying an automatic. But there it was in his hand, blue and dangerous. Eric merely glanced down at the gun in significant warning, and went right on talking.

"—two strangers; one of them was killed, the other severely injured. The murderer was never caught, but you'll be interested to learn, colonel, that he is now flight leader of the 16th Aero Squadron, at Gagneville. His name then was Frazier Peters; now he calls himself Peter Frayne. And you'd better hop over here in a hurry, colonel, because he knows I'm calling you."

The man on the other end was evidently shouting into the phone in great excitement; his words squawked in the receiver.

"Great work! I'll have a man there to arrest him inside of ten minutes! But who are you? How do you know this—"

Eric only smiled coldly and lowered the receiver to its hook.

PETE, frozen into stone before the threat of that leering muzzle, could only gasp his horrified dismay. This was

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the moment of which he had lived in terror for eighteen months. His past had finally caught up with him; now he would have to pay with his life. The man who had brought this about, deliberately, maliciously, stood there before him, grinning. Pete's hatred flared abruptly into uncontrollable rage, and without a sound of warning he sprang.

His first impulse was to get his fingers about Eric's throat, but he did not forget the Colt. He struck savagely for that hand, but Eric swung it behind him, wheeling to present his left shoulder to Pete's charge. In silence they grappled, swaying and shifting, clawing and kicking like wild beasts. Pete striving desperately to reach that gun before it sent a slug crashing through his guts; Eric battling just as fiercely to keep it out of his clutches.

Pete's efforts were in vain; Eric kept control of the Colt. He might have fired, more than once, but apparently he realized it would be unwise; the sound of the shot would bring all hearers on the run. Instead he kept that hand free until he made an opportunity to use it in a different way.

His left elbow slammed up, driving Pete's head back. At the same instant he swung the hand that held the automatic in a vicious swipe. Pete saw it coming, but could only half dodge. The Colt hit him broadside, a wicked crack just above the ear. The room exploded into blackness, and the floor hit him in the face.

Eric, seeing his antagonist sprawled in a silent heap on the planks, lost no time. Thrusting the gun out of sight under his coat, he walked quickly out through the door onto the tarmac. A minute later there came the hollow roar of a starting motor.

That roar penetrated the fog which wrapped Pete's consciousness, and he stirred, groaning feebly. His eyes opened, and his fingers clawed at the floor. His

body began to writhe slowly, like a caterpillar pinned to a card. His torpid muscles pushed at the floor, until he was on hands and knees. When the roar began to fade gradually, telling his spinning brain that the plane was taking off, he growled horribly and tried to spring to his feet.

But the effort only landed him flat on the floor once more. It had been a glancing blow that felled him; at no time was he entirely out. But he learned that the effects could not be thrown off instantly. Although he was wide awake now, his limbs obeyed him imperfectly, and his sense of balance was still reeling wildly. By clinging to the table, he dragged himself erect, but as soon as he let go he fell once more.

Cursing his weakness, he crawled to the door and with both hands on the jambs forced himself again to his feet. By keeping at least one hand on the wall, he managed to stay upright. Staggering, feeling his way, he crossed the empty operations office. In the outer door he paused, steadying himself grimly.

The tarmac was in a turmoil. One patrol was coming in, another was getting ready to take off. But Pete was not interested in these routine movements. He did not even notice that the incoming patrol was shy four of its original six starters. He looked for his own ship, with the white streamers on the end struts, which usually stood close by headquarters. It was not there. But farther down, near the end of the deadline, he saw Number 19.

He guessed at once that Eric, in a hurry, had seized the first plane, the nearest. After all, it made little difference. Pete let go of the edge of the door. He reeled drunkenly, but managed by a violent effort to keep his feet. Weaving dizzily, he staggered out across the tarmac. A mechanic, hurrying past with a bucket, halted to stare, his jaw agape. Pete grabbed his arm.

"Start that motor! Number 19!"

Dropping the bucket, the mechanic obeyed the grim command in Pete's tone. While he tugged at the prop, Pete fought to lift himself into the cockpit. Two other mechanics and the chief rigger, seeing his difficulties, ran over. Pete would not even listen to their protests. In fact, he hardly heard them. His ears were still ringing.

His take-off was sloppy and rough, but once in the air his head seemed to clear rapidly. He banked back over the buildings and set his face immediately toward the lines. Thus he never even saw the Spad which, coming from the south, landed there and, after staying on the ground less than a minute, took off again. His thoughts were all ahead of him.

He never considered the possibility of fighting the charge against him. He knew in his soul that he was a murderer, and knew that he would admit it. He never expected to face the trial. He did not expect to see even his own field now; least of all did he expect to see Eric again, ever. He was going out to one last battle; if that battle ended in death for him, what of it? The cause of justice would thereby simply be advanced a few days or weeks.

CHAPTER FIVE

Death Speaks

NEARING the lines, he was both surprised and infuriated by what he saw. After six hours of heavy artillery preparation, the Boches were attempting a breakthrough on a large scale, with both ground and air forces co-operating. And the nugget of information supplied by Eric was being made use of in an unexpected way.

Eric was a man who prided himself on his shrewdness, his ability to read a situation. A person of simpler mind, having learned what he did, might have figured: I know *these* squadrons are to be *here*; therefore let us throw our strength *there*.

But not Eric. He went deeper than that. On the back of the copy of operations order he had scribbled a message to his higher-ups. "This gives sectors assigned to these American units. Americans are inexperienced, many of them raw recruits. Throw our maximum strength against *them* to assure control of the air."

His higher-ups agreed with him, and had sent large formations of their crack staffels into this portion of the general attack sector, expecting to scatter the green, fledgling Yanks before them like so many leaves. But somehow those Yanks had other ideas. They did not scatter like leaves. On the contrary, they were standing their ground, fighting desperately and savagely instead of running. Consequently this whole sector was one big boiling dogfight, all the way from the ground right up to the 4000-meter level.

The German patrols, coming up in groups of six to ten, were met by V's of Nieuports. Some of those Yank V's contained as many as seven, but most were smaller. Some had only three. But it made no difference. The groups broke up immediately anyway, and each Nieuport was battling desperately against two, three, or four foes. And, so far at least, were holding the enemy out of Allied air. It was only incidental that the battle was so far-flung as to make it impossible for one Nieuport to slip through into Germany without being promptly and savagely attacked by hordes of Fokkers.

With a wild cry Pete hurled himself into the fray where it was thickest. This was just the kind of scrap he had been looking for. What better time or place to give up his life than this? At least he could take several Germans to hell with him.

Within the first ten seconds he sent one there, as an advance payment, so to speak. He dove into a melee where three Fokkers were ganged on one Nieuport. It happened to be a Nieuport from the 84th,

but it mattered not to Pete. His crashing burst drove two of them aside, but the third either did not see or chose to cling stubbornly to his victim. Pete's second burst was aimed not to warn, but to kill. It buckled the main spar in the middle, and the Fokker changed in the twinkling of an eye from a plane in full flight to a tumbling, misshapen meteor. The pilot from the 84th, finding the pressure relieved, whirled on another assailant, and a few seconds later sent a flamer trailing its long column of smoke down the crowded sky. Pete rushed on as if he had an appointment with Satan, and was late.

In the next five minutes he was in and out of half a dozen fights, which in itself was proof of his skill. He did not shoot down a foe every time, but he never allowed himself to be trapped, and he broke up several affairs where other Yanks were getting the worst of it. His guns grew warm, his lips dry from the powder stench.

He zoomed out of a mess when a Nieuport and two Fokkers collided, and fell in one doomed tangle. For a moment he was free to draw a breath, but almost at once tracers rattled off his cowl. He turned; there were no other Fokkers near. Those bullets; they were coming from a Nieuport that wheeled above. His arm jerked in angry signal, but then he saw the white streamers on the struts. His own plane—Eric in the cockpit, then! His chance!

But it was gone before he could seize it. A Nieuport pursued by five foes plunged across his zoom, begging for relief. He somehow tangled with the Germans, and by the time he had shot one down in flames, and sent another careening in a spin, the Nieuport with the streamers had disappeared.

Grinding his teeth he ranged up and down the lines, searching eagerly. About him the battle raged endlessly to the accompaniment of hammering machine guns and thundering exhausts. When he met

a scrap head-on he plunged in, and Boche after Boche felt the impact of his slugs in the vitals, or found the flames licking forth from a punctured gas tank. But always Pete flew on, hunting, hunting.

His numerous engagements cost him altitude, which he did not bother to regain. He found himself now down in the lower levels, where the Spads of the First Pursuit Group carried on. The fighting here was as furious as up near the ceiling; the only difference was that many of the Jerries were in Halberstadts, those venomous two-seaters.

He joined a running scrap that carried him well to the west before he downed a black-crossed trench strafing against a rocky ridge. He zoomed away, curving toward Germany, and saw a sight that brought a growl of rage to his stiff lips. Ahead of him was a Spad, hotly pursuing a Halberstadt. Diving behind it was a Nieuport, apparently to join the chase. But Pete saw the white rags tied to that Nieuport's struts, and guessed its treacherous purpose.

With throttle wide he rushed to spoil that set-up. Would he be in time? The Spad pilot was intent on the prey in front of him, never dreaming that a foul blow was poised behind. While Pete was still at long range the Nieuport's guns opened up. He saw the deadly white streaks of its tracers lace the air, to rake the Spad's tail. For an instant the Spad never swerved. Then it lunged sharply, careening to the left. The Nieuport curved after it, to drive home the finishing blow.

BUT that swerve brought the two toward Pete, and he whirled across their path. His fingers clamped down on his trigger grips. A brief volley, missing the Spad by inches, met the Nieuport on the quarter. It swirled aside in alarm, but Pete swirled after it. When it jerked into a vertical bank, he raked it with a long burst that drove it out into a dive. Mercilessly he pursued the dive, lower and

lower, his guns chattering like twin demons, his engine roaring like a hundred blast furnaces rolled into one.

He didn't actually know which burst did it. His relentless fire seemed to claw the Nieuport to bits, little by little. Fragments ripped loose from the tail, a strut splintered, the right wing began to buckle. Then the motor was coughing black smoke and blobs of oil. It dawned on him abruptly he was shooting madly into a rudderless wreck. In horror he recoiled, like a man who finds himself plunging a dagger into a corpse. He lifted his hand off the triggers, and in the next instant saw that Nieuport flatten itself with devastating finality against a stony slope. As what was left of it burst into an inferno of flames, he pulled his own ship up into a zoom.

A grimace of horror distorted his features. Suddenly he was tired of killing, glutted with slaughter. His muscles shook with fatigue, the rancid stench of his guns nauseated him.

Off in the east a couple of small dog-fights were in progress, and high above there was one swirling melee. Outside of that, those raw recruits of Americans had done themselves proud. They had met the best of the Kaiser's staffels, and repulsed them. Not a single German patrol winged its way on the Allied side of the lines. Those that were still intact were retiring cautiously behind their own balloons.

Pete turned his nose toward the south. With belts nearly exhausted, he could

fight no more, anyway. He paid no attention to the Spad that paralleled his course, for his thoughts were on himself. What irony of Fate! He had gone out to die, yet here he was returning alive. To what? Only to face death again; death in a different form, slower, but just as certain, and tainted by soul-searing disgrace.

He had landed, and was lifting himself stiffly from the cockpit, when he saw that the Spad was following him in. The pilot jumped out and strode directly toward him, lifting off his helmet. He looked straight at Pete, and spoke with evident embarrassment.

"I've never saved a man's life, so I don't know what they say in such a situation. I guess it's pretty hard to say anything much. I didn't really think that devil Frayne would fire on me. You picked him off my tail in the nick of time."

Pete was too numb to feel anything but bewilderment.

"Frayne?" he repeated blankly. "Off your tail?"

"Why, yes. That was Frayne in the ship with the streamers, of course. They told me he'd left, just before I arrived."

Pete seemed to feel a lump of lead forming in his stomach.

"Who are you?" he inquired, knowing the answer already.

"Colonel Fygard sent me up, to arrest him," was the reply.

Pete nodded slowly. He wiped a trickle of blood from his cheek, and then fumbled



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in his pocket, pulling out his identity card. He handed it to the other man without a word.

"But this—this is his name, but your picture! You mean—"

"Go ahead," said Pete. "I'm ready."

The stranger stared at him in horror. "But you—I can't do that. You think I could arrest a man who just saved my life? What do you think I—" He looked about him, as if trapped. "Look here. I'm going back, alone. I never saw you; you disappeared, before I got here."

Pete shook his head. "No. You'll take me with you. There's no other way. I've got to face it. You wouldn't understand, but I really don't mind, now. Come on; there's a car. Let's get it over with."

The ride to St. Denis took less than half an hour.

They descended in front of a long, gray-walled building and were announced through an orderly. He led them in at once, to an office where a gray-haired man jumped up from behind a desk. He took one look at Pete and cried, "No, no, Benson, this is not the man. This is—"

He came to a sudden halt, and his eyes widened. Pete was rooted to the floor, his hands fumbling at his neck, his eyes riveted to this colonel whose name he had never heard before. Was he dreaming? That square, strong-jawed jaw; the tri-

angular scar on the temple, where the hair had never quite grown again!

"You!" he gasped, pale as a sheet. Was he looking again at the dead man's face on the floor of a dock—or was this colonel real. "You were on the pier, that night—I grabbed you, we fell—"

"By God, yes!" shouted the colonel. "I could never describe your face, but now that I see it, I recall it perfectly. You're the one who knocked me cold." He came around the desk, and his manner was menacing. "But the other man, the one who killed poor Sheehan. Where is he? He's the one we've been looking for, all these months. What happened to him?"

Pete opened his mouth to tell him. But the words never came out; at least, not until much later. He discovered one of the strange quirks of nature; that the sudden relief from gnawing terror is sometimes more unnerving than the terror itself. He uttered a short, mechanical laugh, and passed a hand across his eyes.

Then the room began to spin, and the floor rocked up and down. He put out an arm, and felt the colonel grab it. He fought back for a moment, but the room spun faster and faster. He sighed deeply, and his legs buckled. The soft cloak of unconsciousness that enfolded him was the most blissful sensation he had experienced in a year and a half.

THE END

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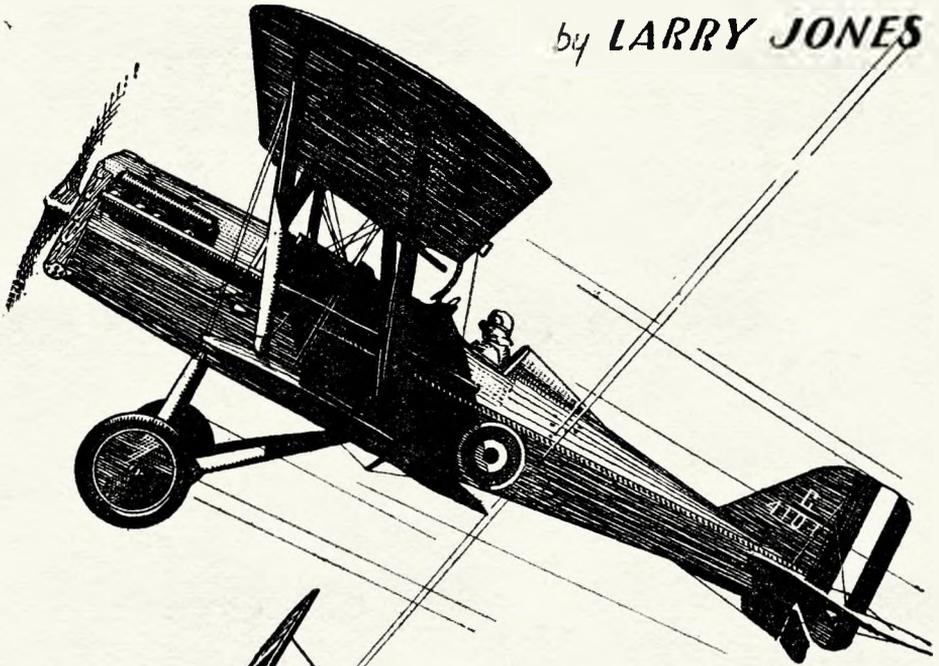
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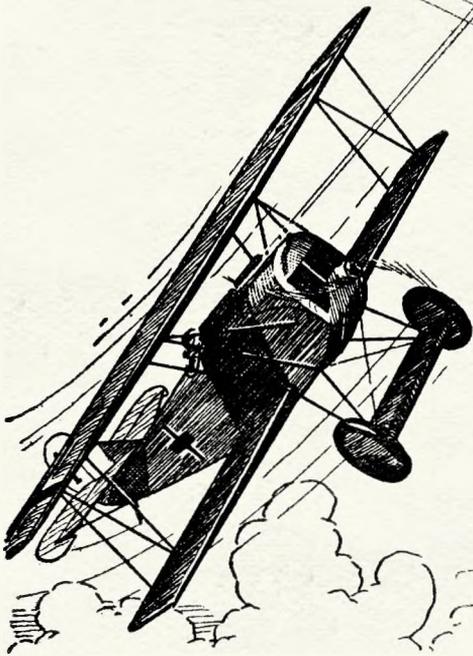
PROBAK JUNIOR

THE *Wizard on Wings*

by LARRY JONES



Slugs whined up through the fuselage behind the pilot's seat.



There has never been a guy like Lieutenant Starkweather, and Chick Allen will bet you ten to one that there won't be any more! This is the amazing story of a screwball who never did anything wrong!

“CHICK” ALLEN, acting C. O. of the Twenty-Fifth Pursuits while Major Jordon was spending four well earned days taking Paris apart, pushed out of the squadron office and ambled over to the hangar line. Shoving a cigarette between his lips he

squatted down beside “Red” Rollins, veteran leader of B Flight.

“Just got a call from Pool, Red,” he grunted. “Our replacement is on the way. Should be here any moment.”

Rollins chewed on a toothpick and nodded absently.

"Yeah?" he echoed. "Wonder what kind of a guy they'll send us this time? Some sap, probably, who figures to win the war between now and Saturday. Funny, these fledglings."

"We were fledglings once," Allen reminded him.

"Yeah," Rollins let go again with his favorite expression. "And Grant took Richmond once. But that was a long time ago, too. I mean, the Fokker fodder they send up here nowadays is different. Seems to me like the recruiting officers must get a bonus for every dope they can slip past the medicos. Now, when we signed up we..."

Rollins stopped, and they both glanced toward the western skies as the familiar drone of a Hisso-Viper powered S.E.5 came to their ears. They spotted it at the same time and critically watched its pilot slide down to a landing. At just the right moment the ship wind-braked, touched ground and rolled to a stop.

"Must be him," Allen murmured. "Well, he can land anyways. That's a help. Say what the hell, did he lose something?"

Rollins made no reply. An average sized youth had climbed out of the pit and walked to the tail of his plane. He attached what looked like a yellow ribbon to the rudder post, and then backed away, paying out the ribbon as he walked. Eighty feet or so away from the plane, he stopped, looked at the yellow ribbon, and then began to wind it up. When he got back to the ship he disconnected the end from the rudder post, climbed into the pit, and taxied up to the line.

Both Rollins and Allen walked over to meet him. They saw a rather good looking youth with a pair of very serious eyes. He had taken a note book and pencil from his pocket and was writing as they walked up.

"Can't wait to get it in your diary that you've arrived, eh, Starkweather?" Allen

smiled. "I'm Captain Allen, chief cook and bottle washer while Major Jordon is on leave. This is Captain Rollins. He'll be your flight leader."

The fledgling smiled pleasantly and saluted smartly.

"How do you do, sir. And you, sir," he said, and nodded to them in turn. "But this isn't a diary. I always record the distance I roll when landing. According to my calculations, an S.E. coming in at a proper glide against a very slight wind should not roll more than eighty-five feet, if you wind-brake correctly."

"So that's what you were doing?" Rollins grunted. "Measuring the roll? Well, I'll be damned!"

"Yes, sir," the newcomer nodded seriously. "It's my theory that a pilot can get best results from his plane if he knows exactly what it is capable of from a technical standpoint. After all, this really is a technical war. By the way, Captain Rollins, just what do you figure is your gas and oil consumption per flight patrol?"

The B Flight leader's mouth came open and stayed open for several seconds before he could get his tongue to working.

"How the hell should I know?" he growled. "And who the hell cares, anyway?"

"It would be interesting data for study," the youth replied. "Particularly from an operations standpoint. For example, if plane A uses less gas than plane B, it's obvious that plane A is of more value to the squadron when figured, or measured, by patrol hours."

Rollins could only make sounds in his throat. Allen laid a hand on the youth's arm.

"That's probably true, son," he said kindly. "But don't stay up nights worrying about it. We're all here to get Huns, and so long as we get them, G.H.Q. isn't even going to bother adding up the cost. You're dead right when you say a pilot

can't learn too much about the possible performance of his ship—but you don't need to find out with a slide rule."

"I can't agree with that, sir," young Starkweather replied firmly. "In engineering class at ground school I learned . . ."

"Hold it!" Allen cut in sharply. "The first thing every fledgling should do upon arriving at the Front is to forget every damn thing he learned in ground school. Combat flying and tactics change too rapidly. Just stick it in your hat, Starkweather, that one good burst of Vickers bullets in the right place will get you a hundred times more than all the slide rule calculations you might make between patrols."

"I'm silenced, sir, but not convinced," Starkweather smiled politely. "Don't misunderstand me. I know I still have much to learn. The science of actual combat, and all that sort of thing. But I've been brought up in the scientific school of thought, and science can be beneficially applied to everything—including the art of destroying enemy aircraft and their pilots."

Allen swallowed, then pointed toward a non-com walking along the tarmac.

"That's Corporal Sharron," he said. "He has charge of the officers' hutments. Go tell him who you are, and say that I want him to fix you up in B Flight hutment. We'll take a look-see patrol over the lines a little later. Now, grab your kit bag and put Sharron to work."

The fledgling saluted and turned back to his ship. Allen and Rollins retreated to the mess where they had the first cognac in silence.

"No, you don't!" Rollins growled as he refilled the glasses.

"Don't what?"

"You don't stick that Air Service Edison in my flight," Rollins snapped. "My God, did you hear him? Plane A and plane B, and . . .? Nuts!"

"Worse," Allen nodded. "But he'll snap out of it. After he's had a few bursts of Spandaus slugs fan his pants he'll throw away his slide rule and pay more attention to his ring sight. He's not the first bird who's come up to the Front with a lot of half-baked ideas."

"But this guy's different," Rollins protested. "I can tell. He *believes* what he spouts. Somebody made a mistake and let him out of his laboratory without his keeper. I'm telling you, that guy doesn't belong at the Front. He'll have us all playing tick-tack-toe on the wing fabric in a week!"

"It's your liver," Allen muttered. "Drink up, and then we'll take him over and show him what it's all about. He'll be a different lad when he gets back, you'll see."

Rollins bubbled his comment into his drink.

AN hour or so later the pair of them led Starkweather aloft. That is, Allen led, with Starkweather on his right and Rollins on his left and slightly behind. For several minutes Allen circled about over the field just to check up on the fledgling's formation flying ability. It wasn't expert, nor was it rotten. In truth, it was just average, the same as any one of a million fledglings who might be assigned to active duty.

At any rate, satisfied that Starkweather would stay with them, at least, Allen swung east and headed toward a hot-bed of German archie guns. The guns opened up as soon as the three ships came into view and dotted the air with their oily black gobs of shrapnel smoke. Flying right into those gobs, Allen twisted in the seat and glanced back at Starkweather. The newcomer was keeping rather ragged formation, but as Allen took a second look he saw that it was not because the archie bursts had set Starkweather's wind up. On the contrary, it

was because the fledgling kept taking his hand off the stick to make notes in his little black book, meanwhile gazing down over the rim of his cockpit.

Allen turned front and gave a little shake of his head.

"The kid has plenty of nerve," he murmured. "Just a loose screw or two that needs tightening up. Yeah, and maybe we can find some Fokker pilot who will do the job for us."

Reaching deeper into enemy territory, Allen kept a weather eye out for tell-tale silhouettes against the whiteness of the clouds. He had to circle about in German-controlled air for over half an hour before his keen eyes spotted the prey. Far off his right wings, and perhaps a thousand feet or so lower, three German Fokkers were drifting lazily toward the lines.

Had Allen been alone with Rollins he would have lost no time in banging down across the sky to give battle. However, he was too good a leader to ram a fledgling head-on into a tough scrap on his first time over, regardless of how eager he was to see the kid's reactions. A few minutes later his caution paid dividends. That is, the three Fokkers turned slightly so that the shafts of sunlight brought out their markings in bold relief.

"Von Borst and a couple of his bums out for a look-see, eh?" Allen murmured as he recognized the white diamond marking of the famous German ace. "Not so good. Maybe I shouldn't stack the kid up against him on his first trip over. He... Well, I'll be damned!"

The last was because young Starkweather had goosed his ship up alongside and was pointing toward the Fokkers with his free hand. A fledgling on his first trip over the lines is so keyed up usually that he hardly sees the clouds, much less enemy aircraft. So, for Starkweather to spot three of them almost a mile away was little short of a miracle.

Allen nodded his head, then motioned the greenhorn back into position. Turning, he looked over toward Rollins. The big redhead was staring wide-eyed at Starkweather and sort of half-shaking his head as though doubting what he'd just seen. But as Allen caught his eye he nodded vigorously.

"Okay, then we will," Allen grunted, and wagged his wings for a right turn. "The kid acts like he knows a few of the answers, so he might just as well get used to von Borst right now."

Sticking up his free hand, Allen yanked back the loading handles of his twin Vickers, glanced over his shoulder to make sure Rollins and Starkweather were with him, then stuck the S.E.'s nose down and went howling across the sky. Von Borst had been around for a long time, so naturally he saw the American ships roaring down at him. A red Very light arced out from his pit, and instantly the two flanking ships swung in closer. All three veered around to meet the attack.

Hunched forward over the stick, eye glued to the ring sight, Allen waited until the Fokkers were well within range, and had already opened their own fire. Then he pressed his own trigger trips. A split second later he heard the steady yammer of Rollins' guns on his left, but there was no sound from Starkweather on his right. However, he didn't take time out to glance around and see what the fledgling was doing. Von Borst's Spandaus slugs were beginning to bounce off his engine cowlings and whine through his center section struts.

When but a few yards separated the whirling props, though, the German got cold feet and broke away to the left, his two flying mates whirling out to the side at the same time. Having broken up the formation, Allen drilled a long burst after the fleeing von Borst, then zoomed up and around and watched Starkweather take his first crack at aerial combat. Rol-

lins had already nailed one of the Fokkers cold and was trying to draw von Borst into close quarters.

Starkweather, however, was doing little more than playing ring-around-the-rose with his man. A dozen times, had he been a seasoned pilot, he would have cut in hard and blasted home a telling burst. But instead he kept forcing the Fokker into a tighter and tighter bank. Allen watching him, cursed softly, and impulsively slid his thumbs up to his own trigger trips.

"Get in there, Starkweather, and nail him!" he roared. "What the hell are you waiting for, an introduction?"

As though the fledgling had actually heard, he started to arc in, but seemed to change his mind and cut off in the opposite direction. In a flash the German pilot pivoted on one wing tip, and Allen's heart leaped up into his throat. In another split second, unless he did something, one scientifically minded greenhorn wouldn't be doing any more flying in this world.

Belting the stick over and jumping on right rudder, Allen whirled around and down, guns blazing. But even as he did, he let out a wild yell of alarm, then cut his fire and hauled his ship up—and held his breath. The blur of Starkweather's diving plane whizzed past his eyes, and then he was in the clear.

Allen swallowed his heart back to its normal place, leveled off from the zoom, and glanced down. To his amazement, he saw Starkweather cut in at the Fokker and practically shoot the pilot out of the pit with a terrific broadside burst. The Fokker actually jumped sidewise in the air, then cartwheeled down to the ground.

"Got him at that!" Allen mumbled. "Why the hell didn't he do it sooner, instead of giving me heart failure?"

He let an answer to the question go with a shrug, twisted around in the seat and searched the surrounding skies for

a sign of Red Rollins's plane. He spotted the redhead swinging down toward him from the left. In the distance, far to the east, was a dot that represented von Borst, high tailing for home and the safety it would afford. Waving his arm in signal, Allen waited until Rollins and Starkweather dropped down into position on either side of him, and then led the way back to Twenty-Five's drome.

LEGGING out first, he went over to Starkweather's plane. The fledgling was having another short session with his little black book. Allen studied him keenly.

"That wasn't your first trip over the lines, was it?" he said.

Starkweather looked up in surprise.

"Why, no, sir," he replied promptly. "I spent a month with Seventy-Two before I was sent back to Tour for re-assignment."

"What was the reason?" Allen demanded to know.

The fledgling looked thoughtful for a moment.

"Frankly, I do not know exactly, sir," he said. "However, I judge it was because I disagreed too much with Major Lampson, the C.O. He didn't like my combat methods, and I refused to change them. After all, it's my life, and I've made quite a study of combat work from a technical angle. Take just now, for instance. I got that Fokker at exactly the right moment. Certain peculiarities of the Fokker's construction cause a drag when making a tight left bank. I've found that its actual speed is reduced 22.5 per cent. However, an S.E.5's speed remains constant in a left bank, therefore if you can force a Fokker pilot to bank left you have an advantage of 22.5 per cent."

"Sure!" Rollins cut in as he walked up "But if there happens to be another Fokker in the air its pilot has a hundred

per cent chance to blast your pants off while you're messing around with the other guy. If I hadn't slammed into him, von Borst would have done that today."

"But you *did* blast into him," Starkweather smiled pleasantly. "Naturally, there are certain unrelated items that one must consider when attempting to arrive at a check-proof calculation. Incidentally, Captain Rollins, and please don't misunderstand—you've forgotten more than I'll ever learn about aerial combat—I do know that if a Fokker is two hundred yards or more in front of an S.E.5 type of plane, it is impossible to overtake it in level flight. I mean that von Borst was a good three hundred yards in front of you when you gave chase."

Rollins' eyes began to spark, and the red crept up his neck. He didn't say anything, though. Instead, he turned on his heel and went shuffling over toward the mess. Starkweather stared after him, then turned wide, wondering eyes to Allen.

"I hope he didn't take it the wrong way," he said slowly. "I just thought I'd tell him. He might be interested. It's a technical fact that can be proved quite easily."

The Acting C.O. counted ten inwardly before he spoke. And when he did there was earnestness in his tone.

"I think I'm beginning to understand why you went back to Tours for reassignment, Starkweather," he said. "It's because you have the habit of opening your mouth and not realizing what comes out. By the way, counting the Fokker you got just now—and congratulations on it—what is your total score?"

The fledgling grinned faintly.

"To be perfectly honest, it's one, sir," he said.

"One," Allen repeated quietly. "And to date, Captain Rollins has bagged twenty-three!"

"I hope to bag that many planes my-

self, sometime before the war's over, sir."

Had there been any boastfulness in the fledgling's voice Allen would have been tempted to place a rock-hard fist where it would do a lot of good. However, the youth had spoken in all seriousness; a quiet, sincere statement of what he expected to accomplish.

"Perhaps you will," Allen said. "But here's another thing to stick in your helmet. Don't let loose with suggestions or advice to men who've forgotten more than you'll ever learn. It's not wanted."

The fledgling reddened slightly.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said. "I won't do it again. I just thought, as I said, that Captain Rollins might be interested. Don't you believe that taking precautions against danger in advance is advisable?"

"Sure," Allen smiled. "But a veteran pilot like Rollins doesn't need any greenhorn to help him take precautions. Stick to your scientific knitting if you have to, youngster, but don't try to cram it down our throats. Or—and get this—don't let it take up all your thoughts in a dogfight. You got a Hun today, I'll admit, but had there been two Huns after you it would have been a far different story. Nail your man quick and fast, like Rollins did. You'll be around much longer. Okay, go make out your flight report. I'll sign it and confirm the victory for you."

"Yes, sir," the youth smiled. "I'll do it in just a minute. First, though, I want to check the oil and gas consumption of my ship for that patrol."

Allen gave it up and went over to the mess. Rollins was inside and the back of his neck was still red.

"That little pup!" he snarled. "Telling me whether I can catch up with a Fokker or not! I'll rip his ears off and shove them up his nose. How the hell did he get that one Hun anyway? Did you herd the Fokker into position for him?"

"No," Allen shook his head. "In fact, I damn near crabbed the act just as he

was about to nail the bird. Maybe the kid has something on the ball at that. He *did* get a Fokker."

"Luck!" Rollins growled. "That bird's as screwy as they come. Better get rid of him before the Major gets back. He'll take him apart, if we don't."

Allen sighed, scowled at the bar.

"Don't think I'm in love with him," he said. "The kid's just a fledgling, so I'm giving him the breaks. He can fly, and he can handle his guns. If there was only some way to bust him loose from his scientific daze we'd have a pilot well worth having around."

"Yeah?" Rollins muttered. "And if the Germans would quit fighting, the war would be over. That guy's screwy, and he always will be. Me, I don't want any part of him. I'll..."

THE sudden ear-blasting howl of wires and struts in the wind cut off the last. Simultaneous with the howl came the blood-chilling, throbbing roar of a dozen Mercedes engines. As one man, Allen and Rollins whirled and went charging out the door.

"Von Borst's brood!" Allen shouted the instant he glanced up. "Sore because he lost two and is going to take it out in a drome straffe. Everybody up!"

The last was entirely unnecessary. Every member of Twenty-Five was racing toward the ships on the line, zigzagging as they ran to throw off the aim of the diving Fokker pilots. Hardly had Allen leaped into his pit than he saw an S.E. tear out onto the field and take off. His eyes popped as he recognized young Starkweather in the pit. And the Acting C.O.'s eyes almost snapped from their sockets when he realized that the fledgling had not actually taken off. On the contrary, Starkweather was buzzing around the field with his tail up but the wheels of his ship still on the ground.

"A missing engine!" Allen groaned as

he saw the diving Fokkers swerve toward the fledgling. "Get back to the hangars, you fool! Get back to the hangars and dive for cover!"

As Allen roared the last he banged his own throttle forward and went zipping out from the line. Holding the ship on the ground as long as possible, he hauled the stick back and went prop clawing upward. A lone Fokker to the right tried to slam in on him and cut him down with a withering blast before he was high enough to maneuver his ship. But Allen had been through too many drome straffes to be caught that easily. Whanging his ship over, with the wingtips just barely missing the grass, he whirled about in a dime turn, flattened out and shot forward, then zoomed up. The Fokker overshot its mark and couldn't come around in time.

And that was just too bad for him. Allen had the Fokker in his sights just long enough for one short burst. But that short burst was all that he needed. The German pilot slumped in the seat, and his ship nosed into the ground at the edge of the field and burst into flames. Swinging around, Allen started after a second victim. It was then that he suddenly realized Starkweather was in the air and trying to force von Borst to come around at him in a tight left bank. In the same instant Allen realized that every plane of Twenty-Five had taken off, and not one of them had been nailed before the wheels cleared.

That fact brought a startled grunt to his lips. And then he realized that Starkweather, racing crazily about the field, had drawn the majority of the diving Fokkers toward him and thus made it possible for the other Twenty-Fifth pilots to take off without being bothered much.

"Science or no science," Allen grunted, lining up a second ship in his sights, "that was headwork on the kid's part—and guts, too!"

With that final comment he brushed

the fledgling from his mind. He did because you can't think of other things and barge around in an attempt to drive clear of three most annoying Fokkers at the same time. And three of von Borst's brood were trying to put him out of the world and the war for keeps. Passing up the cold meat shot that was his for the asking, he concentrated on keeping Spandaus bullets out of his own hide instead.

His S.E. shivered and trembled as lead ripped and tore through the tail section, but somehow he managed to keep it from rippling up the fuselage to the cockpit. In fact, he managed it by nailing one of the Fokker pilots who became too daring and tore right across in front of his nose. Taking advantage of the "hole" offered, he thundered through it and up into the clear with the bursts from the other two Fokkers chewing through thin air below and behind him.

A snap glance around pulled his lips back in a tight grin. The Twenty-Fifth was letting von Borst's brood know that they didn't like to be attacked on their own field. Four German ships were already on the ground in flames, and a fifth was coming down slowly in small pieces. One flight of Fokkers had got more than a bellyful and were well clear of the general fight and high-tailing back toward the German lines. And the second flight was trying to do that very same thing. They would have if Twenty-Five's pilots would only let them the hell alone, and leave them in peace.

Allen eyed each Fokker, trying to spot von Borst's personal markings, then stiffened in the seat as he saw the German ace's plane well off to the left side of the scrap. But the man was not alone, nor did he seem to be in much trouble. In fact, he was practically coasting about and enjoying himself while young Starkweather went through all the maneuvers in the book to draw him into a tight left

bank. Allen pounded the cowling.

"You blasted idiot, that's von Borst!" Allen shouted wildly and yanked his own ship around and down. "He's no sucker for a left bank. He'll . . ."

He finished with a groan as the German ace suddenly became a whirlwind of action. Like so much flashing light the Fokker ripped into a full roll, dropped its nose in a short dive, and then came tearing right straight up at the vertical. Perhaps Starkweather outguessed the maneuver and just managed to get his cockpit and the seat of his pants out of the way in time. But from Allen's point of observation it most certainly looked as though Lady Luck herself had shoved the S.E. forward so that von Borst's deadly burst smashed up through the belly of the S.E.'s fuselage—not more than six inches in back of the pit.

Although he was well out of range, Allen nevertheless fired both guns in a desperate effort to distract the German ace's attention just long enough to give Starkweather a chance to wing well out into the clear. However, he might just as well have heaved flatirons at the Fokker for all the good his bursts did. Von Borst closed in on the fledgling in a furious burst of speed. Allen closed his eyes and groaned again.

"The young fool," he muttered through clenched teeth, "he *would* tackle von Borst single handed! He's . . ."

The wild howl of a diving plane and the savage yammer of Vickers guns jerked his eyes open. From out of nowhere Rollins was charging straight down on the German. Von Borst saw him coming, cut away from Starkweather and went into a dive. Too late he realized that he was too close to the ground for a dive to do him any good. He pulled out and tried to split-arc out from under Rollins' diving ship. But the redhead was all over him like a tent, and a split second later Allen, himself, went charg-

ing in from the side to lend a hand.

PERHAPS the German had just a little bit of yellow in him, or perhaps he figured that a live prisoner has it all over a dead hero. At any rate the German flung up both his hands in a gesture of complete surrender and both Allen and Rollins killed their fire. Swinging alongside, the Acting C.O. pointed down toward Twenty-Five's drome. The German ace nodded sadly and eased the nose of his Fokker down. By then what was left of the rest of his patrol was on its way east as fast as the ships could take them. And so von Borst had an escort of the whole of Twenty-Five Squadron as he floated down, landed, and taxied up to the waiting hands of the greaseballs on the line.

He climbed slowly to the ground and bowed stiffly as Allen walked over to him.

"My compliments," he said in thick English and let his eyes slide over to Starkweather, "your decoy fooled me completely. I thought we were too far away from the others but . . . I was wrong."

"That's how it goes in war," Allen said grimly. "Captain Rollins, give the prisoner a drink or two, and then turn him over to the guardroom corporal. Starkweather, I want to talk with you."

The Acting C.O. waited until the others were out of earshot, then he turned and fixed scornful eyes on the fledgling.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Well, what, sir?" the youth echoed.

"Just what were you trying to do this time?" Allen snapped. "Set an endurance record, or something? I thought I told you to get your man, and get him quick. In case you don't know it, you're damn lucky to be alive."

The fledgling frowned slightly, then changed it to a smile.

"I wouldn't say that, sir," he replied. "Frankly, I could have shot von Borst

down, if necessary. Instead, though, I was gradually forcing the man down."

"Oh, so that's what you were doing, eh?" Allen grated.

"Yes, sir. There are a lot of things our aeronautical engineers can learn from a study of enemy aircraft. Particularly this new type of Fokker. It was my intention to capture it intact, and determine its qualities from a scientific angle. I've never had the opportunity to examine one at close quarters. But speaking of von Borst's plane, sir, I would earnestly suggest that . . ."

The look that leaped into the C.O.'s eyes stopped him. Allen's words sounded like steel against steel.

"Just one more of your dizzy suggestions, Starkweather," he said, "and I'll bounce you back to Tours quicker than that! I can stand a lot, but not too much. You came damn close to losing your life for the second time. We don't need pilots in this outfit who have to be wet-nursed out of jams like the one Rollins just got you out of."

A queer glint came into the fledgling's eyes. It was followed by a brooding look as he stared at von Borst's Fokker.

"Very good, sir," he said. "But I'm sorry that Captain Rollins saw fit to come down. From a technical point of view, I had the advantage over von Borst. At sea level the pitch of a Fokker propeller does not permit the Mercedes to develop maximum power. He was steadily losing altitude and didn't realize it. I did, and that knowledge was what I had counted on. I'm serious, sir."

Allen took a deep breath.

"Maybe *you* think you are," he said, "but I think you're screwy. Just as Captain Rollins remarked, as screwy as they come. Good Lord, son, doesn't the proven experience of others mean anything to you?"

"Decidedly yes, sir," the fledgling nodded instantly. "But there is nothing in

the world today that cannot be improved upon from a technical or scientific point of view. And I'm sure my theories will be proved before the war's over."

"If you last that long!" Allen snapped. "Well, you've received your last warning: any more of your scientific suggestions or technical advice—or screwy combat flying—and back to Tours you go."

"Yes, sir," the youth sighed and went over to his ship.

Allen stared after him.

Swinging around, he headed over toward his hutment for some cigarettes. Half way there, he saw von Borst being led away to the guardroom to await transportation to Wing for questioning by Air Service Intelligence.

And just one hour to the minute later, it happened!

Allen was in the squadron office making out the drome straffe report when a wild shout and the sharp crack of a service gun sent him out of his chair and over to the window in a rush. As he glanced out he saw the green-gray uniformed figure of von Borst come racing around the corner of the end hangar. Momentarily amazed at the German's speed, Allen just stood there and watched von Borst leap into his Fokker. A split second later the Fokker's engine roared up, and the plane went scooting across the field as the guardhouse corporal came staggering onto the tarmac clutching a smoking gun.

A curse on his lips, Allen banged out through the door and went racing over to the hangar line. The guard saw him and waved wildly.

"Asked me for a cigarette, and then clipped me, sir!" he shouted. "I . . ."

Allen didn't stop to hear any more. He let out a roar for a mechanic and vaulted into the pit of his ship. A greaseball appeared as though by magic and twisted the stick. Allen started to bang the throttle open when Starkweather rushed up

and grabbed his arm.

"I'll phone, sir!" the youth cried. "Don't worry, I'll . . ."

It didn't make sense to Allen, and he didn't stop to ask questions.

BY the time he was clear of the ground and zooming up, von Borst's plane was little more than a speck to the east. Nevertheless, the Yank hauled his ship around and gave chase. For ten minutes he went thundering off in pursuit of the German, and then suddenly he stiffened in the seat and let out a yelp of surprise. Von Borst was still a good four miles from the German lines—yet he was nosing down toward a strip of level ground!

A couple of minutes later the German plane was on the ground and completely surrounded by American doughboys. Allen cut his own throttle and slid down to a fast landing close to the Fokker.

Von Borst bowed stiffly again as Allen pushed through the ring of doughboys.

"It is indeed my unlucky day," the German sighed. "My engine went back on me . . . refused to take me the few remaining miles. Well, as you said, that's how it goes in war."

An infantry captain laughed.

"You said it, Fritz!" he said. "Our pilots can even call their shots. We got word you'd land here, and damned if you didn't!"

"What's that?" Allen cried. "You got word? What . . .?"

"Sure!" the infantry captain nodded. "A Lieutenant Starkweather, of Twenty-Five Squadron, called our Brigade colonel and said that a Fokker would be landing some place in this sector, and to grab the pilot. And here he is."

Allen blinked, swallowed hard. It was a couple of seconds before he could get his tongue to working.

"Starkweather called you?" he gulped.

"Yes," the other nodded. "The Colonel's to call him back and let him know

we got this guy."

Allen almost took the wings off his ship in his haste to get back to Twenty-Five's drome. He found Starkweather in the squadron office. Rollins was there, too.

"Thank God you're back, Chick!" Rollins gulped. "This bird's gone completely off his nut, and I didn't know whether to shoot him or sock him. Guess what? Right after you took off he called the Fourteenth Infantry Brigade colonel and told him that a Fokker would land near his sector, and to grab him!"

"I know it," Allen nodded. "And that's just what von Borst did. Fourteen is holding him for us until we send a guard detail."

"Huh?" Rollins yelped. "Say, what the hell is this?"

"That's what I want to know!" Allen nodded curtly, and fixed Starkweather with hard eyes. "Where were you when von Borst clipped that guard?"

"In my hutment, sir. I ran out when I heard the guard's shot."

"Then how come you called the Fourteenth Brigade?" Allen barked.

The youth smiled.

"You wouldn't let me suggest it to you, sir," he said. "So I had to do it on my own."

"Do what?" Allen demanded.

"Make it a technical impossibility for von Borst to reach his own lines should he attempt to escape," Starkweather said. "The Fokker has an emergency gas tank that permits ten minutes more of flying when the main tank goes dry. The top speed of von Borst's Fokker is one hundred and twenty miles per hour. In short, with as little wind as there is today, he could travel twenty miles in ten minutes. And the Fourteenth Infantry Brigade sector is just twenty miles due east of here. You see, sir?"

"No!" Allen snapped. "What's all that data got to do with your phone call?"

"Everything," the youth smiled. "I disconnected his main tank feed line and hooked it up to his emergency tank. When he took off, I knew that it was a technical impossibility for him to travel more than twenty miles toward his own lines. You wouldn't listen to me, so just as you were taking off, I came here and called the Fourteenth to tell them what to expect. And—well, my calculations were correct. I might add, they *had* to be."

Allen said nothing. He stared blankly at Rollins. The redhead snorted and started for the door.

"Let me out of here!" he mumbled. "Maybe its contagious, and I'm plenty satisfied to be just a plain combat pilot!"

THE END



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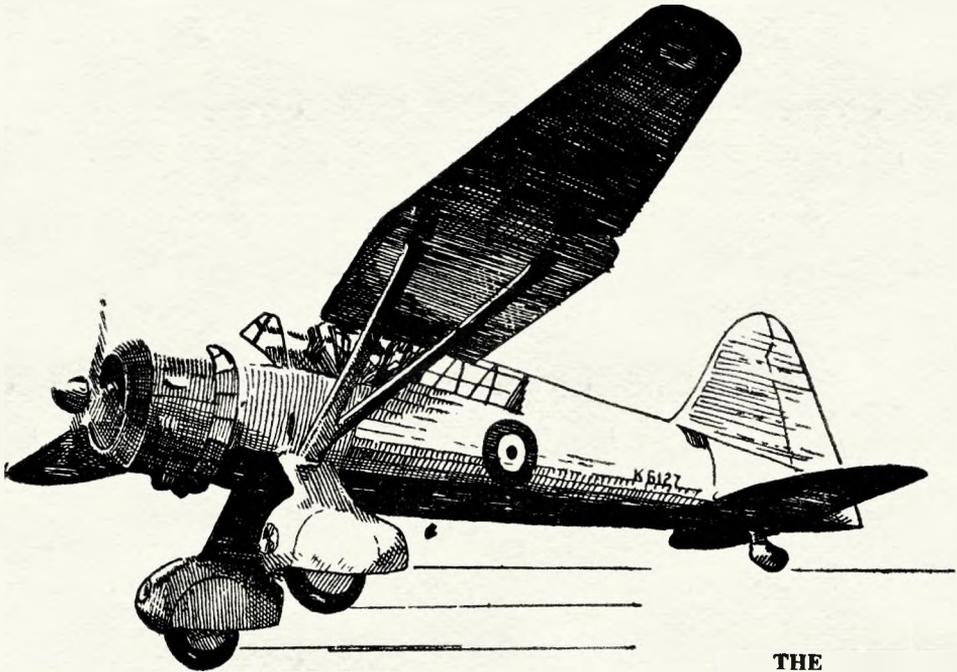
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Story Behind the Cover



THE
WESTLAND
"LYSANDER"

THERE isn't much to say about the scene on this month's cover. In the first place, I may as well confess that the whole thing is a phoney. It never happened. Just what mountains are being flown over I don't know. But the idea is that a good spot to set a catapult would be on top of a mountain, although from the looks of things, the boys with the catapult are having plenty of trouble.

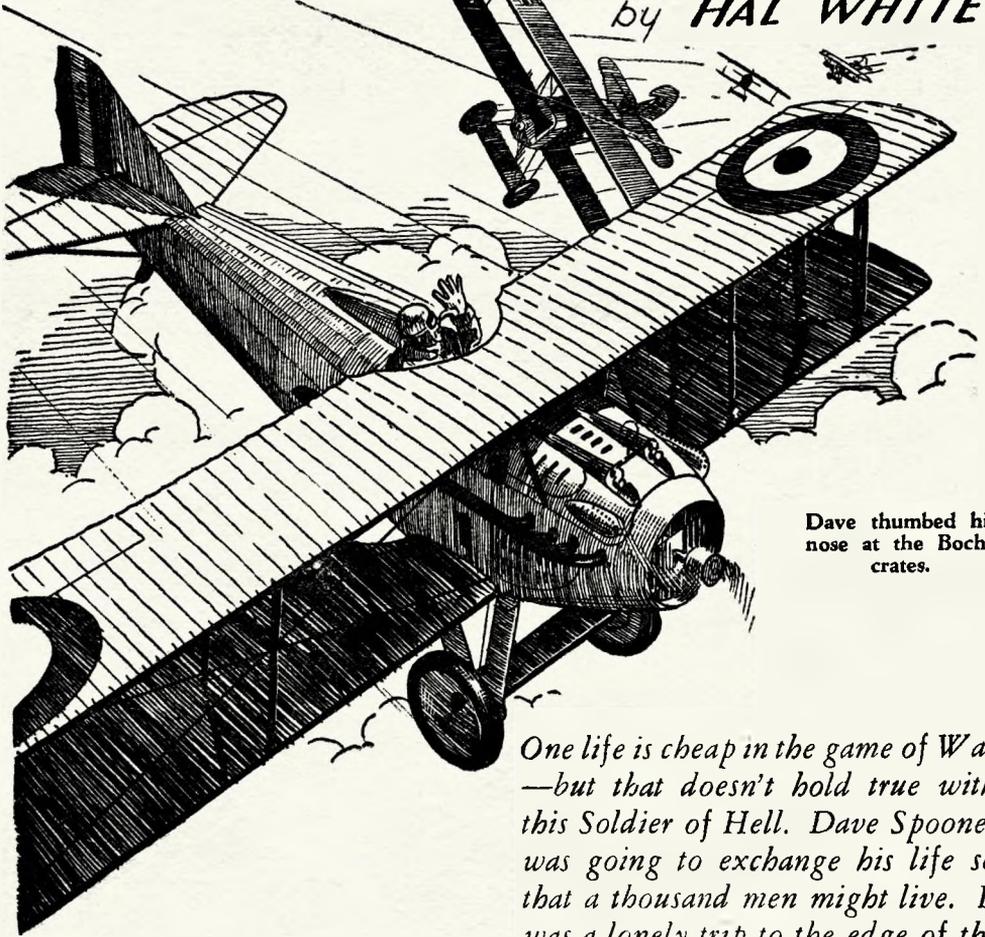
This catapult, however, is not my imagination working overtime. It has been used by the British Navy, and on land, exactly as it is portrayed. The only difference being that the British didn't use a mountain, and they weren't wrapped up in any war.

The big ships, of which I have done a sketch overhead, are Westland "Lysanders." These are two-seat co-operation monoplanes, which, at the writing, are so new that performance figures are quite unavailable. All I can tell you is that it has an excellent field of view and that there are landing lights in the wheel spats. By the way, the little blue ship on the extreme left of the cover has cooling gills back of the cowling. But that doesn't do you any good, because you can't see them. . . .

FRED BLAKESLEE.

The Soldier of Hell

by HAL WHITE



Dave thumbed his nose at the Boche crates.

SCOUTING alone, twelve thousand feet above the lines, Captain Dave Spooner looked down on a writhing blanket of smoke, shot through with the scarlet flash of exploding shells. Out of that smoke, like an island in a sullen sea, loomed the crest of the German stronghold, Hill 203.

The grim, determined gaze of the American ace was on that rocky crest as he banked his Spad in wide, slow circles. Something had to be done about Hill 203.

For three terrible days, and three heroic, horror-filled nights, the American ground troops had tried—and failed—to take the powerful position.

One life is cheap in the game of War—but that doesn't hold true with this Soldier of Hell. Dave Spooner was going to exchange his life so that a thousand men might live. It was a lonely trip to the edge of the grave—but a helluva fight while it lasted!

Again and again, with reckless, shouting courage, the steel-helmeted lads in muddy olive-drab had hurled themselves against the great fortress; and each time, as giant waves are smashed into spray against some granite cliff, the hill had broken them—sent them reeling and tumbling back into the valley in red streams of agony.

Futile slaughter like that could not continue. G. H. Q. knew it, Wing knew it, everybody knew it. And yet this hill,

standing squarely in the way of the American advance—wielding its fiery scythe of death in front and on either side—had to be taken. No matter what the price, it had to be taken!

The glass of Dave Spooner's goggles gleamed flatly in the cloudy morning light as he looked beyond the crest to the country beyond the hill. The smoke was lighter back there, and he could see the narrow ribbon of steel that led northward.

The ribbon was the narrow-gauge railroad over which supplies and ammunition came up to the fort by night. The trains dove right into the hill with their loads, through a tunnel that opened into a regular network of trenches.

Spooner's eyes gleamed suddenly with fierce light, and he struck the leather coaming beside him with his gloved fist. An idea had occurred to him—an idea so wild, so desperate, that he laughed aloud at his own insanity. His laughter was lost in the roar of the motor, but the idea persisted.

"Why not?" he muttered through clenched teeth. "I could try, anyway."

And then he saw five horizontal black lines slanting up at him from the east. They were coming so fast that almost at once he could identify them for what they were—Fokker D7s—hot on his trail.

It was time to get out of there, and get out quickly. He whipped the Spad around in a vertical bank, leveled off, and slapped the throttle hard against the stop. The big Hiss responded with a roar, and the ship leaped. Spooner turned his head and thumbed his nose at the five spinning props behind him.

Fifteen minutes later, he sat facing Major Martin Noland, skipper of the 47th Pursuit Squadron, in the operations office. The burly, red-faced C. O. leaned back in his swivel chair and looked at his ace pilot.

"What's on your mind, Dave?" he asked.

"It's about Hill 203, Skipper," Spooner said. "The ground troops are tossing away their lives by the thousands, and getting nowhere. Artillery can't dent those rocks. Bombs are useless. I want to have a go at it—alone."

The major took his cigarette from between his lips, and stared in amazement. "What have you been drinking, Dave?"

Spooner smiled grimly. "Not a thing, Skipper. Here's my idea."

"Shoot, boy."

"I take my ship up to the ceiling tonight, cut the motor and slant down to that field behind the hill. I get to the railroad on foot, snag an ammunition train when it passes, and hide myself on it."

"And then—?"

"I ride with it into the hill, and then I blow up the train with some dynamite that I'll take along. When all those shells let go, they'll blow the top off the place, clear the way for the infantry. What do you think?"

The major swallowed cigarette smoke, gagged, coughed, and burst into vehement speech.

"I think that's the wildest, craziest, most cock-eyed idea that's come out of the war! Are you completely off your nut, Dave?"

"I am not. It's worth a try! I might fail, but—"

"*Might* fail! Boy, you wouldn't have a chance in ten million."

"Why wouldn't I?"

"Well, in the first place, you couldn't land on that shell-torn field in the dark. Even if you could, you'd be spotted and grabbed."

"I'll wear a German uniform."

"And be shot for a spy? Like hell you will! You don't know any German—a few words, maybe—and they'd nab you the minute you opened your mouth. Besides, if—if—you got into the hill and set off your dynamite, where would you be?"

"Probably riding the volcano, high up, signaling the doughboys to come on." Spooner shifted his lean body in his chair, and his eyes gleamed. "Anyway, Skipper, if we could take that hill, what the devil does it matter where I'd be?"

The major did not answer at once. His lips twisted, and he sat silent, staring down at the curling smoke of the cigarette in his hand. At last he looked up, suffering in his eyes. The major loved his boys, all of them, and his feeling showed in every line of his face.

"I know, Dave," he said thickly. "A sacrifice play. That part of it is—all right. But the odds are too much against you. I—"

"It's worth a try, sir, isn't it?" Spooner leaned forward earnestly.

The major masked his emotion with a long drag at his cigarette, and for a moment found no words. Then he spread his hands in a gesture of surrender.

"God help me, son! What can I say except—go ahead—try it."

"Good!" Spooner's blue eyes glowed with a fighting light "Now for the details."

For some time the two men sat planning the coup. When the door closed, finally, behind the big shoulders of his ace flyer, the major lifted an arm as though in salute. Then that arm dropped on the desk, and the skipper's gray head was bent wearily upon it. In his ears, as he sat there, motionless, was the heavy rumble of firing from Hill 203 . . .

THERE was still a faint gray light in the sky when Captain Dave Spooner waved "so long" to a tight-throated group of men on the tarmac of the 47th, and lifted his ship into the air. He wanted to be at 15,000, ready to begin his long glide into Hun territory, as soon as complete darkness had fallen.

The Spad had been painted black, from prop boss to vertical fin. Spooner's flying

coat was black, also, and his leather helmet. In the night he and his ship would be as invisible as a bat.

He climbed in wide spirals until the sobbing exhaust of the Hisso and the feel of the ship under him told him that he could go no higher. Then he leveled off, and circled slowly.

The night now was as black as the devil's back bedroom. Not a star above, not a light below, except where Hill 203 showed a long, writhing line of flame that marked the trenches and the incessant fighting.

That ghastly flare of gun muzzles and bursting shells was the only landmark he needed. It was like the open, yawning doors of hell, spewing heat and hate and death. He shoved the stick forward, cut the throttle, and slanted down to keep his date with the devil.

The Spad slid silently through blackness that was almost fluid in its intensity, and it was like moving through a sea of ink. Spooner felt the dark against his eyeballs, like a pressure there, and he blinked, shook his head, shrugging off the strange feeling that he was suspended in interstellar space.

He strained against his safety belt, felt it press hard against his stomach as he thrust his head over the coaming to look down at the flaming trench lines and get his bearings. The wind whipped at his cheeks, and the cold, wet smell of mist was in his nostrils. It was late October, and there was a biting chill in the air.

He crossed the trench lines at a point some distance to the right of Hill 203, and mile-high to avoid possible observation by the vigilant archies. Then he banked left, and continued his cat-footed glide toward the field.

As he neared the ground, he felt his muscles tense and his heart hammering. To land in this terrible well of blackness was going to take not only all the skill he had, but a big measure of luck besides.

He had six fat sticks of dynamite and several fulminate of mercury caps tied to his belt under his flying coat. If he piled up, that stuff would surely let go, and that would be the end of his pretty little plan.

A thousand feet—five hundred—two hundred. His nerves steadied. And now, eyes narrowed against the mist, he saw the brown dead grass that covered the field. He saw shellholes, too, plenty of them, and his lips tightened grimly as he fishtailed to slow his speed.

The wheels touched, swishing in the grass. The Spad leaped like a shot rabbit, touched again, rolled swiftly. A shell hole yawned, black and empty as the eye socket in a dead skull.

Spooner cursed, gave the ship right rudder, but the left wheel caught the edge of the hole. The tail whipped around, kicked up, and the nose went down. The prop and the left wing splintered with an echoing crash, and Spooner, his safety belt unhooked, was hurled violently through the air.

He got his head under him, and lit rolling, fully expecting to be spread over the whole German back area by the explosion of the dynamite. Then his head hit something. He heard bells and saw stars before everything went black.

When he opened his eyes he was lying on his back, with his feet and legs in a shellhole. It took him a moment to realize that he was still alive. His head was spinning, and he gripped it in both hands, trying to steady it.

After a minute he got to his feet and staggered over to look at his ship. One glance, and he realized grimly that he had certainly burned his bridges behind him. He was grounded in enemy territory, his Spad a complete wreck.

"But I wasn't going back, anyway," he muttered, "so what the hell! Lucky this dynamite didn't mess me up too soon."

He looked around him. Off to the

southwest, a mile distant, Hill 203 was sharply outlined in the flame of its own big guns and the flare of shells bursting against its rocky sides. But around him was silence—silence so absolute that his nerves prickled with the menace of it.

The tall Yankee headed for the railroad, which he judged to be about half a mile away. He moved like a prowling tiger, every sense alert to detect movement in the night around him. Somebody, he thought, might have heard the plane crash. If they had, they would be looking for him.

The tangled grass dragged at his boots and shell holes, some of them half full of slimy, stinking water, waited to give him a nasty bath.

The air was thick with the nauseating odor of decay. Men had died here, many of them, and been buried in shallow graves. The bodies of some had been spewed up again by the explosion of shells, to lie in fragments on the ground and fester there. Spooner tasted the smell in the back of his throat, and his stomach heaved with it.

But it was the lurking danger of living men, not the dead, that kept his eyes alert and his ears tuned to the slightest sound as he groped his way along.

He nearly stumbled over the railroad before he knew he had reached it. He followed along the rails until he came to a place where the road had been rebuilt around a giant shellhole. A train rounding that curve would be moving slowly enough for him to board it.

Was there a train near? He went down on hands and knees and laid his ear against the cold steel of the rail, listening for the singing sound of approaching wheels.

He heard no wheels. Instead, a muttered curse behind him brought him leaping to his feet, and he whirled to face a German whose leveled bayonet was within inches of his belt buckle.

The big, overcoated Hun stood crouched, rifle gripped hard. His narrowed eyes, under the coal scuttle helmet, spat fire while his lips hissed questions.

Spooner did not need to understand the language. The words, savagely snarled between bared teeth, told him that the man had heard the crash of the plane and knew that he had an American aviator in his clutches.

The bayonet point gleamed dully, clinked against the belt buckle, and the stomach muscles of the Yankee ace crawled with the threat of it. Like a cat he threw himself to one side and back, his hand darting to his holstered automatic.

Instantly the German lunged, and pain blazed along Spooner's left side as the bayonet tore him. He staggered as the bloody blade whished within an inch of his throat in a second thrust. Then his automatic bucked and roared in his hand.

The tall German jerked as though an electric shock had tightened him. He straightened convulsively and stood swaying. Then his rifle dropped from his nerveless hands, clattering on the ties. He toppled on his face, full length, his steel helmet ringing on the rail as he went down.

SWEARING between clenched teeth, Spooner gripped the fallen man and half lifted, half dragged him a safe distance from the track and into the concealing mist and dark of the field. The man, he knew, must have been a railway guard, and if the crash of the plane hadn't warned others as well, the shot certainly would.

He threw himself on the cold, wet ground and lay listening tensely, his eyes fighting the dark. He was so concerned with this new threat that he hardly felt the blood running down his side, warm and trickling under his shirt.

Sure enough, here they came! Some-

one shouted, and another person answered. A man stumbled hastily along the ties, barely visible. Another joined him, and they talked excitedly.

Spooner gripped his automatic, and wriggled farther away. But the two did not come into the field. They moved on northward, their shouts dying away.

The American grinned to himself. If they had found the body of the sentry, lying on the track, they would have brought half the German army on his neck. But they would surely report the guard's absence, he realized, and a search would be organized. There was no time to waste.

He went back to the body of the German, got down on one knee and began swiftly to unbutton the field-gray overcoat.

"I hate to do this, old chap," he muttered, "but I need your outfit."

Even without the major's warning, he knew what would happen to him if they caught him wearing that uniform. He would be planted against a wall and shot as a spy.

"But what the hell difference does that make?" he growled to himself as he worked. "Firing squad or dynamite, my finish is the same."

In a few minutes he stood up in full German uniform, booted, overcoated, with the coal scuttle helmet firmly on his blond head. There was a bullet hole in the overcoat, but no blood on it—yet—and it would have needed a keen eye to see through his disguise. He looked like a good German soldier, and might fool suspicious eyes long enough to get into the tunnel with his dynamite.

He covered the dead sentry decently with his flying coat and went over to the tracks. He picked up the rifle and sat down on the end of a tie, the long weapon across his knees.

The first numbness of his wound had worn off now, and his gashed ribs began

to throb and ache fiendishly. It was a surface wound, not deep—he had found that out when he was changing clothes—but it was still bleeding, and he felt faintly dizzy. Maybe the searching Huns would give him time to sit quietly for a little while, and the flow of blood would stop.

He laid his ear against the rail to detect anything, footsteps or a train, that might be approaching. But he heard nothing. Far off to the southward the red flame of battle showed as a ruby glow through the blackness, but around him was only the lonely night—that and the sickening smell of the battlefields.

Voices again, far off, but coming closer. They were moving down on him from the north. He got up, made for a shellhole, ducked into it.

The shouting men came closer, calling to each other in guttural German. More of them, this time, and his teeth clicked together as he realized that they were searching the field on both sides of the track.

Their feet, in the heavy German boots, swished through the grass and thudded on the ground, and Spooner heard the rattle of canteens and other belted equipment as they stumbled, swearing, through the shellholes. Two of them loomed almost above him, and he froze rigid, sure the jig was up.

But they missed him, left him gasping with relief. After that, the hours dragged on—long, weary, impatient hours. He lay there, growing weaker and cursing with worry. If dawn found him there—!

At last, a sound in the night. Spooner's head, pillowed on his arms, came up alertly, and he gathered his waning strength. Nearer it came—the unmistakable rattle of train wheels and the sharp barking exhaust of a small steam locomotive.

Straining his eyes, Spooner made out the faint glow of a light. It was swinging slowly, apparently in signal, as the train approached the dangerous curve. Then,

as the moving bulk loomed out of the dark, the American exclaimed in surprise. For it was not the engine at the front of the train, but a long, low, ammunition gondola with others behind it. The clank of driving rods and the spit of sparks from the smokestack came from farther back, at the rear. The locomotive was pushing, not pulling.

Spooner was briefly puzzled. Then he understood, and his lips twitched in a half smile.

"There's too much powder lying around loose under that hill to risk a fire-breathing engine in there," he told himself. "So much the better. The more ammo, the higher the hill goes when I set it off!"

The front car, with its swinging signal lantern, came onto the curve, and he heard the clank of drawbars and the hiss of air-brakes as the train slowed cautiously.

And now the train was barely moving, flanges squealing on the rails of the curve. The American moved with panther speed toward the middle of the long line, praying that there were no guards on those middle cars. Between the signal lantern up front, and the weak yellow glow of the engine's kerosene headlamp there were no lights.

The gondolas, he saw, were loaded with huge shells, standing on end. Enough of them to blow the hill to kingdom come! He picked a car which looked to be only partially loaded, gripped the low steel sidewall and swung aboard.

Throwing himself flat, he felt the hard roughness of canvas under him, and the sharp bulk of boxes beneath that. This car was carrying shells at the rear end and supplies, covered with heavy tarpaulin, at the front.

The piled boxes bulked so high that he feared he would be seen, and he scrambled to the center of the car, next to the shells. There he hauled back the tarpaulin and hastily moved boxes and bags to either side until he had a hole in which he could

hide. It wasn't big, but it would do.

He lay down in the cleared space, the steel floor cold under his hands, and drew the canvas over him like a small tent. By moving it slightly he could see to the front, and between the rows of shells, to the rear.

The quickened exhaust of the engine, and the *tuck-a-tuck* of rail joints under the wheels told him that the train was picking up speed again. He snatched the dynamite from his belt, recklessly crimped a percussion cap on one end of the fuse with his teeth, and rigged his bomb.

He laid it between two of the great shells, on the car floor, and reached into his pocket for his matches. His lips tightened as he felt the wetness of the little box.

The pasteboard fell apart in his frantic fingers as he tried to open it. The matches inside were a sodden mass, useless—soaked with his own blood! He flung them aside and lay muttering angry curses as the train sped on toward Hill 203.

Then he thought of his automatic. The flashing impact of a shot, with the weapon held close, ought to do the business. Teeth bared in a determined snarl, he inserted the remaining percussion caps between the sticks of dynamite, to make sure. Then he took another look at Hill 203, drawing nearer, and settled down to wait.

Spooner lay with his face close to a burlap bag of coffee. His nostrils twitched with the fragrance of it, and he laughed at himself as he thought how much he would like a steaming cup of the delicious brew, and a cigarette, before he had to fire that shot.

He peered out again. The roar of the fighting was louder now, and the looming, jagged crest of the hill was coming closer—closer.

THE fingers of the Yankee ace closed tightly around the butt of his automatic, and he felt with his hand for the

dynamite. The dangerous sticks, the shells near him, the whole long trainload of deadly explosive, waited only for the pull of his finger on the trigger. He wondered vaguely if he would feel anything when that awful stuff went off smack in his face.

Like scenes on a movie screen, pictures flickered before his mind's eye: a sunlit pool, with trout rising to his fly; a girl's lips smiling as he bent to kiss her; packed grandstands roaring as two teams smashed at each other on the gridiron; the boys singing "Hinky Dinky, Parley Voo." in the messhall at the drome.

Spooner shook his head angrily, fighting off those memories. Forget all that! Forget it! He settled the butt of the automatic more firmly in his fist, and his finger nestled against the trigger. A glance showed him the hill almost above him.

And then the brakes ground harshly on the wheels, and drawbars clanged all up and down the long line of cars. The train slowed, stopped—just outside the tunnel entrance.

Spooner hissed a curse. "Come on, you guys!" he whispered fiercely. "Let's get it over with!"

But the train stood. Someone came running along the cars, and the American, hidden under his tarpaulin, heard him shout to someone else. He understood little German, but he interpreted the words "American aviator," and he knew what that meant. They had found his plane, and they had stopped the train to search for him!

The shouting man raced for the front of the train, his voice quickly lost in the roar of guns from the hill. Spooner risked a look, saw no one near him. He slid out of his hiding place and vaulted over the side of the car to the ground.

Up ahead, men with lanterns were swarming onto the cars. Figures loomed out of the dark, running along beside the train, peering underneath. They came close to Spooner, almost bumped into him.

But Spooner was busy, too, hastening along the line, looking into and under the cars. Apparently he was as furious as any of them to find the *verdammte* American.

The trick worked. They paid no attention to him. He continued to rush around on his faked search, moving always toward the rear of the train, until he saw that the men on the ground had gone up front again. Then he went on toward the engine, whose lights glowed redly through the dark.

A wave of warm air assailed him as he came opposite the locomotive, and the smell of smoke and hot oil. There was the rumble of steam under pressure and the muffled throbbing of a water pump.

On Spooner's side, the engineer stood in the gangway between engine and tender, the lighted cab empty behind him. His hands gripped the hand rails on either side, and he was leaning far out, looking along the train.

He growled out an excited German oath as Spooner passed him, but the American answered only with a wave of his arm, and went on around the back of the tender.

On the other side of the tender he stopped and darted a quick glance forward. The searchers on the cars were halfway along the train now, their lanterns coming dangerously close. And a shadowy figure was moving toward him beside the cars. He snatched out his automatic, stepped quickly to peer into the gangway.

The engineer was still leaning out, looking along the train, his back to the American. Spooner vaulted into the gangway, his boots grating on scattered lumps of coal.

The engineer whirled, but too late. The butt of the automatic came down on his skull, hard, and with a gurgling groan he staggered backward and pitched from the cab onto the ground.

Someone coming along the train saw

him and yelled a warning. Spooner sprang to the throttle, jerked at the heavy lever. The engine shuddered with the sudden, fierce thrust of steam against the piston heads and spewed a loud belch of sparks and smoke from the stack.

But the drivers, with too much steam behind them, slipped on the damp rails and spun like fiery pinwheels. The little locomotive shook in every joint, and the exhaust racketed like a machine gun, drowning the startled shouts of men.

Spooner closed the throttle slightly, narrowed eyes watching both gangways. The spinning stopped, the wheels gripped, and the couplings bunted together all along the train. It moved, slowly, with the stack roaring and smoke rolling up.

Outside, wild yells rose. A man loomed in the open gangway, Luger in his fist. Spooner drove his heel at the uniformed chest, and the man spun backward, disappeared.

Another grabbed for the handrail, hung on, and drove furious shots into the cab. The big Colt in Spooner's hand spat flame, and the snarling face under the coal scuttle helmet fell away.

Jerking at the throttle, the American felt the surge of power under him as the engine responded and the train picked up speed. He was running a crashing gauntlet of guns from both sides now. Bullets plucked at his clothes, spanged on his helmet, went spinning off into the night. Broken glass rang on the deckplates as windows and the round, lighted faces of gauges were smashed by flying lead.

Teeth showing, eyes hard, Spooner yanked the throttle wide open and the engine shook and clamored. A bullet cut the pipe of the steam gauge and steam spurted from the broken end to mingle with the choking smoke.

A German officer made a desperate lunge for the handrails, caught them and scrambled aboard. Masked by the smoke and steam, he was in the cab before

Spooner saw him. Colt and Luger bel-
lowed together, and red swords of gun
flame crossed like dueling blades.

Spooner felt a numbing shock as a slug
ripped through his right forearm, and his
gun clattered on the steel plates. But the
German, hit squarely amidships, was
down. His body hung for a moment on
the edge of the gangway, then fell off.

Through the swirling smoke, the Amer-
ican saw the arch of the tunnel only a
hundred feet ahead. Most of the cars
were already inside. With his left hand
he picked up his automatic. Then he
swung out of the gangway and jumped.

He hit the ground rolling, came to his
feet like a cat, and ran. He had gone only
a few yards when the speeding train
crashed, inside the arsenal, and every
other noise in the world was lost in a
thunderous roar as hundreds of tons of
high explosive let go.

The shells and all the other ammunition
in the place detonated in a quick, rolling
thunder that blurred into one mighty ex-
plosion. Spooner, lifted and thrown by
the force of it, saw the top of the hill
break open and spout flame like a volcano.

THERE was a moment of tense silence,
as though the whole world held its
breath, appalled at the sight, and then
the fragments began to rain down. Out of
the night sky came everything—earth,
rocks, chunks of torn steel; wet, soggy
bits of what had once been men. Spooner
rolled into a shellhole and lay there while
half the war descended around him.

Then he got out, and staggered away
across the fields, toward his plane. He
neither knew nor cared whether his dyna-
mite or the jolt of the collision had set off
those shells. The job was done, and well
done, and now there was but one thought
in his mind—to put distance between him-
self and the tragic Hill 203. A flyer—
first, last and all the time—he headed
toward his ship with some vague idea in

his dazed, reeling brain that he might get
it into the air and away.

American artillery, recovering from its
first astonishment over the flaming des-
truction of the hill, began to work its guns
at top speed, and shells rained down on
the smoking ruins of the rampart.

Some of them struck near Spooner, but
he paid them no heed. He was like a man
walking in his sleep, staggering on, stum-
bling into shellholes and climbing out of
them—growing steadily weaker with loss
of blood from his gashed side and his torn
forearm.

The gray light of dawn was in the sky
now, and hazily he knew that German
ground troops were moving forward, some
of them in small groups, others in loose
company formation, advancing on the
double quick to the defense of the line.

They passed Spooner without notice.
To them he was just another wounded
German, staggering to the rear. On all
sides they streamed by, rifles gripped, hel-
mets gleaming dully in the cloudy morning
light. Up ahead, they met the American
doughboys, pouring hellbent around the
ruins of Hill 203, and the fighting flamed
up, sharp and furious.

Spooner didn't worry about that. He
knew that the doughboys and the artillery
could take care of the situation, now that
the hill was gone. He was staring at his
plane, a hundred yards ahead of him in
the field.

The sight of it stirred him out of his
daze, steadied his pace. He went on a
half run toward it, desperately intent on
learning the extent of the damage to it.
And then he saw the broken prop, the
smashed wing, and he stopped, drawing
the back of his hand shakily across his
eyes. It was wrecked beyond repair. That
was why there were no guards around it.

Passing Germans looked at him curi-
ously, then with aroused suspicion as he
went up to the Spad and rested his head
wearily on his arm against the uptilted

right wing. They muttered among themselves, and some of them started toward him.

But they never got there. The air was suddenly filled with the scream of diving ships and the deadly chatter of Vickers guns. Spooner lifted his head and stared in amazement. Everywhere he looked, the dawn-lighted sky was full of planes.

New strength surged through the veins of the American ace. He shoved himself away from the wing, stood erect and hurled his German helmet on the ground. Bareheaded he stood, his muddy, blood-smearred face lifted to those diving crates, and from his throat came a ringing, exultant roar.

A Spad roared so close to Spooner that the wind of it ruffled his hair. He had a flashing glimpse of a head in a black helmet thrust over the coaming, and of an arm waving to him.

The ship zoomed, circled, swung back—then leveled off for a landing! Heedless of shellholes, it came down, bounced crazily, and reeled toward him. Out of the cockpit vaulted Major Noland, running toward him.

“**D**AVE, you wild, crazy, damn fool!” The skipper was laughing and crying in the same breath, and his arms were around the shoulders of his ace flyer. “Come on, son, we’re getting out of here.”

The major led the staggering pilot to his ship, helped him onto the wing. “Hit bad, son?” he asked anxiously as he worked with the lashings.

Spooner shook his head, grinned weakly. “I’m all right, Skipper.”

“We’re going home, son,” the major said. “We’ll have you right as rain in a few days.”

“Do me a favor, will you, major?”

“Surest thing, Dave. You’ve earned anything you can ask for. What is it?”

“Set your course to cross over the hill. I—I’d like a look-see.”

The major laughed. “Damn right! I’ll show you the sight of a lifetime, Dave. When you busted that hill you turned loose the biggest drive of this man’s war. The Yanks are coming. Boy, *how* they’re coming! Let’s go!”

They climbed steeply, and the great panorama of the American movement opened before the dazed eyes of the wounded ace. Near and far, the air flashed with bright wings, quivered with the roar of motors and the crash of machine guns.

The broad sweep of the ground advance brought an amazed exclamation from Spooner. The roads to the south were packed and jammed with men, tanks and guns, moving up to drive through the gap.

And now the Spad was directly above Hill 203. Spooner, the wind whipping his hair, looked down at it and could hardly believe what he saw. The once powerful fortress was a black, yawning, smoking crater, the wreck and the ruin of German hopes.

Into it, through it, and all around it, swarmed the advancing doughboys. Bayonets glinted, rifles and machine guns belched red flame; hand grenades erupted smoke and destruction as the helmeted lads in olive-drab drove resistlessly forward.

A thrill of pride and happiness surged through the tall body of the ace flyer, and he forgot that he was wounded, sick, dizzy with fatigue and weakness.

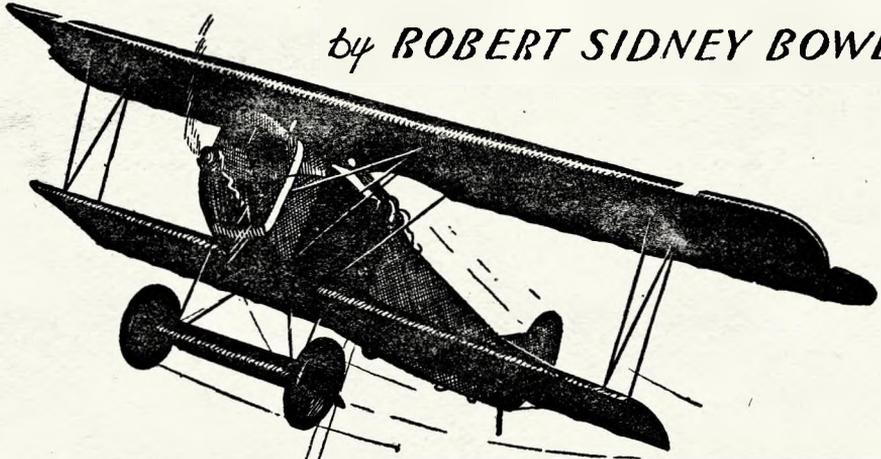
“Come on, you doughboys! Rush ‘em! Smash ‘em! Come on, you Yanks!”

And then, gratefully, he laid his tired cheek against the fabric of the wing and let the war—everything—slide away while the Spad roared homeward.

THE END

Aces *be* Damned

by ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN



The Spad hung by its prop and clawed at the belly of the Fokker!

Hell came on wings and wheels to the tarmac of Squadron Thirty-Five and left the bloody stamp of von Trummer! There is a story behind the hot guns of this killer that has never been told before; and the story is now here before your eyes—written in the scorching lead of hate—and answered by the stronger steel of courage!

AS the Fokkers broke through the clouds and came hell for leather with their hot guns singing a song of death, Major Jackson twisted around in the seat and glanced upward. A startled frown appeared on his lean wind bronzed face.

"Don't tell me those tramps have found guts enough to actually attack first!" he muttered. "Why, they're . . ."

But his words broke off with a gasp of surprise. These diving planes did not carry the insignia of the same German staffel that had been in front of Thirty-Five for the last couple of months. These guys carried no insignia at all—not even

the usual black and white cross! From wingtip to wingtip they were the color of midnight. Which meant, of course, that a new Hun staffel had moved into the sector. But more important, these planes were not piloted by a lot of green-horns who were just finding out how to operate a Spandau gun. For even as Jackson signalled the rest of the patrol into battle formation, German slugs smashed into his cockpit and turned the instrument board before him into so much junk. A split-second more and a few other messengers of death would poke holes through the top of his helmet.

That, however, did not happen. The instant the red flare arced out from his pit, Jackson jumped down hard on right rudder, slammed the stick over and went spinning down and away in a slashing half-roll that virtually made the wings groan in protest. Slamming the stick back into his guts, he rode up the sky in a mighty power zoom that brought him right up under the belly of one of those jet black Fokkers. For the first time he saw that this one wasn't entirely all black. There was a thread of white at each wingtip, and a circle of white about the nose, just back of the prop boss.

"The leader," Jackson grunted, and pressed both trigger trips home. "Might just as well nail him first."

A hundred other Fokker pilots would have been dead geese before Jackson's snarling guns, but this guy was different. Even before the Yank's first burst had ripped out, the Boche craft seemed to turn almost inside out and surge into the clear. In another air blasting maneuver, the Hun cut back in. Jackson instinctively ducked as slivers of wood popped off his center section struts.

"There's a pilot!" the Yank choked and whammed around in a dime turn. "That guy knows something and so do those bums with him!"

He spoke the last as he raced his eyes over the surrounding sky. And it was no lie that had leaped from his lips. The all-black Fokkers were tearing into the ships of B Flight like so many metal wasps gone haywire. True, the Yanks were handing back just as good as they received, but it was a helluva lot different than it had been for the last two months. In short, the swarm of new Fokkers were serving notice to Thirty-Five Squadron that the party was over and that a guy would have to fight like hell for a piece of sky to fly in.

But suddenly the black strangers delivered a second surprise. A green flare shot out from the white-tipped Fokker. Instantly every one of the Fokker pilots cut sharply away from the battle and went streaking eastward, leaving the pilots of B Flight pop-eyed and dumb-founded.

Shaking himself loose from his momentary trance, Jackson wagged his wings. He waited until the others dropped into formation, then led the way back across No Man's Land to the home drome of Thirty-Five. No sooner had they landed and taxied up to the line than the other pilots gathered about Jackson. There was the same unspoken question in every eye. Jackson shook his head.

"Don't ask me, fellows," he said. "I never saw that brood before. But it means we'll have work to do. Until further orders there'll be nothing less than full flight patrols. They'd chew us apart if we went out in pairs. Meantime I'll call Paris Intelligence and find out what outfit it is."

Pulling off his helmet and goggles, the C.O. started over toward the squadron office. Halfway there he was stopped by one of the field orderlies.

"A replacement pilot arrived while you were on patrol, sir," the man said. "He's waiting in your office."

Jackson nodded and kept on going. The replacement had the features of a boy, but

there was a lot of grey in his brown hair, and his slightly sunken grey eyes had a queer look in their depths. They were like the eyes of a man who had looked out upon a lifetime of bitterness, heartache, and regret. He saluted smartly as Jackson entered, and handed over the usual Pilots' Pool transfer papers.

"Lieutenant Harmon, reporting for active duty, sir," he said quietly.

"Welcome to Thirty-Five, Harmon." Jackson smiled. "Sit down. Be with you in a minute. Want to put through a call first."

THE C.O. dropped into the chair at his desk, reached for the phone, and absently spread out the replacement's transfer papers with his other hand. At that moment, his hand reaching for the phone stopped short and dropped heavily onto the desk. The blood slowly faded from his bronzed face, and his eyes fastened on the transfer papers became cold and hard. Then presently he lifted his head and stared at the newcomer.

"Harmon!" he said tight-lipped. "Second Lieutenant Ralph Harmon! You . . . you were once Captain Harmon, the acting C.O. of Seventy-Two?"

Jackson's last words came out like rifle bullets. Harmon's eyes seemed to dull, to actually sink deeper into his head. Then they became wide, and his jaw dropped.

"My God!" Harmon started. "It didn't click until just now. Then . . . then you're Bill's brother! He said he had one in the service."

The C.O. had half risen from his chair. The blood had entirely drained from his face, now, and he looked as though he was going to fling himself across the desk that separated them. He managed somehow to hold himself in check, but his voice rang with cold fury.

"Yes, Bill Jackson was my kid brother," he said. "And he was a flight leader in your squadron when you were given the

acting command. So you're the skunk who sent him out on solo patrol that day? Sent him straight into a ten Fokker trap and his death. By God, I wish I'd been there. I'd have cut your dirty heart out and thrown it down into the German trenches for them to keep as a souvenir. And you're the man Bill used to write to me about. His best friend . . . his pal . . . God!"

Harmon's face seemed to twitch with terrible pain. And when he spoke, his voice seemed to come from the bottom of his boots.

"Bill Jackson was the finest man God ever put on this earth," he said. "And he was the best friend I ever had, or will have."

"Will have?" Jackson flung at him savagely. "As if there's a man this side of Germany who would want to be called your friend! A man who sends his best friend into a death trap, because he's too damn yellow to go out himself! Why, at your trial, they didn't throw you into the gutter or place you against a wall, I'll never be able to understand. I heard all about that trial. There had been special orders from G.H.Q. that no planes would fly that day. The drive was about to be started, and they wanted to keep that new S.E. job that your squadron was flying a complete secret right to the last. Intelligence knew that the Germans had brought up every damn staffel they could spare . . . that it was suicide for less than a flight to go out on patrol. So orders were for no ships to leave the ground. Yet, you . . . you were willing to risk a man's life so that you might get some extra information about the enemy positions, and win yourself special praise. So you sent Bill out . . . you admitted it at the trial. Sent a man out to his death, against orders. By God, you've got a hell of a nerve coming to my squadron, Harmon!"

The other stood up. His face, too, had

turned white as paper, and the very fires of Hell, itself, seemed to be seething in tormented fury within him.

"It didn't occur to me that you were Bill's brother," he said in a voice that trembled with strain. "I would have requested to be sent to another squadron."

"That you should be sent to *any* squadron!" Jackson blazed. "My God, and they considered yours a just punishment! Reduced you in rank, took away your damn medals, and kept you grounded for a few months. And now you're back, thinking you can take your place with real men. There's no place for you in Thirty-Five Squadron, Harmon. I don't want you. And, by God, you're not going to stay! In Thirty-Five we're all willing to take the chances the next man takes, and to hell with the rewards. So, naturally, you wouldn't fit in here. Now get out! Go on over and join up with the Huns. They can use your kind."

Harmon's face turned from white to blazing crimson. His fists doubled into rounded rocks, and he took a half step forward. But that was all. He checked himself and unclenched his fists.

"I did all my talking at the trial, Jackson," he said with an effort. "And so there's no more to say. No, there is something I can say to you, because you were his brother. Wherever he is, Bill understands and knows that our friendship is still the same as it ever was. But what's been done has been done . . . and I'm going to carry on, no matter what kind of a job is handed me. I'm still a Yank, and a pilot . . . and to hell with you and anybody else."

With a grim nod for emphasis, Harmon picked his transfer papers off the desk. Then he saluted smartly and started out through the squadron office door.

"Wait!" Jackson suddenly stopped him. "Come back here. Give me those papers."

Harmon did as ordered, stood before the desk motionless, while the C.O. raked

him from head to foot with brittle eyes.

"On second thought I'm accepting you," Jackson said. "At some other squadron they might have forgotten about your little act. And that would place somebody else's life in jeopardy. Besides, you just made the bravado crack about carrying on, no matter what kind of a job was given you. Well, I've got a job for you in Thirty-Five, Harmon. I'll tell you later. Right now . . ."

AT THAT moment the high-keyed howl of wires and struts in the wind cut down into the squadron office from out of the eastern sky. Jackson didn't so much as glance out the window. Too often had he heard the pulsating roar of a Mercedes powered Fokker not to recognize it this time. In two leaps he circled the desk, shouldered Harmon to one side, and went bounding out the door.

Once out in the open he glanced up. At first glance he saw nothing but black wings and black fuselage racing straight down out of the cloud-dotted blue. Then as his eyes focussed, he saw that the wings were tipped with white, and he saw the white circle about the cowling. Like so much black light the plane dropped straight toward the ground. Then when it seemed that its spinning prop would chew right into the field, the Fokker curved out of its dive and went zooming skyward. It left a colored message streamer that dropped slowly to earth. It had hardly touched the ground when a mechanic was out there scooping it up. He came racing back to the other men on the tarmac and handed Jackson the envelope. It was addressed to:

THE COMMANDING OFFICER OF
THIRTY-FIVE SQUADRON.

Jackson ripped it open, extracted the folded sheet inside, then smoothed it out and read the scrawled words:

Sir:

This is to inform you officially that my Staffel has taken over the field formerly held by Staffel Six. A short time ago we had the pleasure of a slight encounter with you, and a few of your stupid pilots. Unquestionably we could have destroyed your entire flight then and there, but it is a matter of honor with me to inform my victims of the identity of their destroyer in advance. So, we spared you a short time more of life.

Now, however, you have been so informed. In the future you can expect no mercy. We shall shoot you from the skies as we have shot so many others of your kind. Of course, you can avoid such a thing by requesting of your superiors to transfer you to some other section of the Front. However, it is for you to make the choice. And for us to kill you, one and all, on sight.

Baron von Trummer,
Staffel 13.

"Von Trummer!" Jackson grunted as he came to the signature. "Von Trummer and his Staffel of Black Death. So!"

"And the trickiest bunch of vultures that ever came out of Hell!" somebody else echoed. "Those babies are tough, particularly von Trummer. I've heard plenty of him."

Other comments were forthcoming, but Jackson didn't hear them. Someone had pushed up to his shoulder and practically ripped the letter from his hand. It was Harmon, and the man's eyes were like glowing sparks as he read it.

"Von Trummer!" he breathed softly. "Von Trummer . . . here on this Front?"

Jackson grabbed the letter back, and there was cold scorn in his voice when he spoke.

"Yes, von Trummer!" he gritted. "The greatest fighter in German sky. And you are staying, now, whether you like it or not. Gang, this is Harmon, a replacement. Maybe some of you will remember that he used to be Acting C.O. of Seventy-Two. He's staging a come-back, and asks no favors. He'll get none."

There were a few who did remember, and after giving Harmon a long hard stare, they turned silently away and headed over toward the mess. The replacement didn't move, nor did he lower his eyes. He swallowed just once, then turned to Jackson.

"I'd like to speak with you, sir, alone," he said.

Jackson shrugged, stuffed von Trummer's letter in his pocket and turned toward the squadron office.

"Come along, then," he grunted. "Matter of fact, I want to talk to you. A little job so that you can get your hand back in. You must be aching to, of course."

Harmon made no comment. Lips pressed tightly together he followed his senior officer back into the squadron office. Once they were inside, Jackson swung around, placed both hands on his hips and regarded the newcomer with the cold look of contempt that had never left his eyes since he'd first realized who Harmon actually was.

"Well, supposing you get your say off your chest first," he clipped. "Then I'll have mine. But, I'm warning you right now—if it's a request to be sent back to Pool, it won't be granted. You gave orders to my brother, and he died. And now, by God, I'll give some to you. Well?"

Harmon sucked in his breath slowly, gazed for a moment out the window, then suddenly flicked his eyes back to Jackson's face.

"You hate my guts, Jackson, because of Bill," he said, and seemed almost to linger on the last word. "And I don't intend to do anything about changing your opinion, even if I could. But all that aside. Have you ever been across the lines from von Trummer's outfit?"

The C.O. shook his head.

"No," he said. "So what? The tougher the Fokker pilots are, the better this squadron likes it. A bullet's a bullet, and

it'll snuff out a crack pilot, just as it snuffs out a green fledgling."

"If you get the chance to shoot a bullet," Harmon said. "That's why von Trummer has been around for so long. You see, Jackson, I've had experience against von Trummer and his brood. I know their tricks and how they work. You'll get other notes from von Trummer."

Jackson's eyes narrowed, and he frowned.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Von Trummer has but one ambition in this war, apart from the sheer love of killing," Harmon said. "That's to top Richthofen's record of Allied planes shot down. He's close to that now, and it's my guess that he'll use every one of his old tricks to reach his goal. The one he uses most is to send a challenge to the C.O., or some other leading pilot in the squadron. A challenge for a man-to-man scrap at some point over the American side of the lines. That's the catch. Being willing to scrap it out on our side, it sounds fair and square. It isn't. You meet him, and start to scrap and suddenly he dives away—dives *toward the west!* You think you have him on the run, and what happens is that he leads you straight into his vultures. They have flown along the ceiling beforehand and are waiting to eat Yankee meat. They tear you to ribbons before von Trummer gives you the final touch. And then the Kaiser sends von Trummer congratulations on another thrilling victory."

As Harmon paused, Jackson shrugged. He seemed unimpressed.

"That stunt's not new," he said. "That's been tried on all Fronts. If he sends me a challenge he'll get a surprise. Thirty-Five will be patrolling the surrounding air . . . just in case. But, you just said that he finishes off his man. I take it, you never met him, eh?"

The other's face tightened.

"I never have," he said evenly. Then

swaying forward, "But I'm going to. Listen, Jackson, being C.O., you'll get that first challenge. I'm going to accept it myself."

Jackson's eyes flashed.

"The hell you are!" he barked. "You . . . ? Ah, I see. Perhaps if you became something of a hero—eh? That's what you mean? Conscience has driven you to desperation? Well, it could be like that. But if you shot down a million von Trummers, it wouldn't mean a thing in my eyes, Harmon. You've had your chance to be a man."

"I'm not going to shoot down von Trummer because of what you or anybody else might think, Jackson," Harmon said through clenched teeth. "I'm going to do it because it is something I can do for Bill. It's something I owe to him. Yes, now I'm telling you. It was von Trummer and his brood that shot your brother down."

For a few moments there was absolute silence in the room. The C.O. stood like a man who had suddenly been smashed square in the face. Then he shook himself and dragged air in through his clenched teeth.

"You, the man who sent Bill to his death, think that now *you* can avenge it?" he rasped. "Kill von Trummer yourself and thus remove the stain of another man's blood from your shield? Like hell you will! This is a job for me. I . . ."

The blind fury that had suddenly flooded into Harmon's face stopped him short. The newcomer's eyes were blazing, and every muscle on his face twitched and quivered.

"I've lived in hell since the day Bill died, because he was my friend!" the pilot breathed fiercely. "But it served its purpose, so I don't give a damn about that. I requested to be sent back to the Front, because that's why I came to France . . . to fight. But now that von Trummer's in front of us, I've got a *real* reason for being

here. To get him. I'd have tried it long ago, but I heard he'd been transferred to the Austrian Front. Now, though, he's back. He's here. I'm asking you in all fairness to give me this one chance, for Bill's sake. But if you won't give it to me . . . *I'll take it!*"

Jackson reached up and touched the oak leaf on his shoulder strap.

"See that?" he snapped. "I'm a major—your superior officer. By God, you'll obey my orders. And there's just one . . . you're grounded for the present. That a sudden spell of stricken conscience forces you to wild action, doesn't move me in the slightest, Harmon. You did something months ago that no man could forgive, least of all, me, Bill's brother. No, you'll get no chance from me to reverse a coward's weakness. Get out of here. And by God, if I see you go near a plane, I'll shoot you like a dog, so help me!"

Harmon's eyes dulled, and there was that something in their depths that tears men's hearts to shreds.

"I said I'd take it!" he muttered. "And I will. Von Trummer's rotten hide belongs to *me!*"

AS Harmon spoke the last, he stepped forward quickly and brought up his right fist. Jackson saw it coming and just managed to twist the fraction of an inch to the side so that his chin would not receive the full force of the terrific blow. However, even though his chin was saved, the fist caught him on the side of the neck. He spun around twice like a top, and would have gone over backwards had the desk not been there to check his fall. He banged into the desk and bounced off to the side, just as Harmon swung his left. That blow caught him on the side of the head and filled his brain with dancing colored lights.

"Knock me out, would you, eh?" he heard his own voice rasp.

By then he had managed somehow to

get his feet braced under him. He blocked Harmon's next swing, and shot in a right of his own that did some damage. But for all the good it did to stop Harmon, he might just as well have hit the man with a pillow. Grim, cold determination of purpose was stamped on Harmon's face as he started to rush in again.

Suddenly, though, he stopped cold. In fact, both of them stopped and stiffened rigid as boards. The air outside had suddenly become filled with the roar of many Mercedes engines, and the yammer and snarl of twice that number of Spandaus guns. It was Harmon who moved first. He spun in a whirlwind of speed over to the window and took one flash glance outside.

"Von Trummer's brood!" he yelled. "A drome straffe. Out of my way!"

Harmon almost knocked Jackson flat as he bounded over to the door and hurled himself through it. Catching his balance, the C.O. went tearing out himself. When he reached the open air, all hell seemed to break loose. A dozen or more jet-black Fokkers came ripping down, their snouts spewing out twin streams of jetting flame. On the ground, grease-balls and mechanics alike raced pell-mell for the ships on the line. One of them had already stopped a burst of explosive bullets in its gas tank, and it was blazing up in a cloud of livid flame and smoke. Frantically, the mechanics dragged the nearest ship away. Its prop was already ticking over.

One of Thirty-Five's pilots started to vault into the pit, but someone grabbed him, hauled him down and shoved him to the side. Through the haze of smoke that was beginning to spread over the tarmac, Jackson recognized the pilot who did finally leap into the pit, and send the Camel rocketing out across the bullet-swept field. That man was Harmon. A roar of rage bursting from his lips, Jackson charged forward toward his own ship. The straffing planes had started to unload

their small bombs, and little fountains of dirt and smoke spouted up along the edges of the field.

During the next few seconds Jackson was a tornado of speed and action. Eventually he was in the air, flinging his plane with snarling guns at the nearest all-black Fokker. Sweeping up under him came the rest of Thirty-Five, and like so many eagles gone stark, raving mad, they hurled themselves into battle. In as many minutes, two Fokkers rode down to earth to spray out in smoking wreckage. As each one had gone down, Jackson shot it a keen glance between bursts. But neither plane had had wings tipped with white.

As a matter of fact, as he succeeded in driving a Fokker for cover and was able to zoom up into the clear for a moment, he suddenly realized that no Fokker was tipped or cowling-rimmed with white. Von Trummer had obviously sent his brood over for the dangerous task of enemy drome straffing, but he had remained at home.

Even as that knowledge came to Jackson, he suddenly realized with a start that there was also another plane missing in that melee of twisting, turning, bullet-spitting ships. The plane that Harmon had grabbed and taken off in, was no place to be seen. True, Jackson did not have more than a split-second or so at a time to look, but when he did have the chance, he saw no sign of Harmon's stolen crate.

Eventually, when a third Fokker plummeted to earth like a comet on fire, the others decided to call it a day. They turned tails and started high-balling to the east. So that perhaps the black vultures would think twice before they tried another surprise straffe, Jackson led his pilots after them in hot pursuit. He nailed another as they reached the lines, and sent it crashing down into a German trench. That accomplished, he called off Thirty-Five's pilots and led the way back home. Before landing, he counted noses. There

were only two planes missing. The one that had been fired on the ground, and the one Harmon had taken. Once they were on the ground, Jackson pressed the question.

"Did anybody see what happened to that bird, Harmon?" he asked. "Was he shot down, and I missed it?"

"No," somebody said, "but I'll never understand why. That guy's nuts. He's crazy!"

Jackson instantly button-holed the speaker, a tall redhead from C Flight.

"What do you mean?" he snapped "What did he do?"

The pilot blinked and grimaced.

"Maybe I was just seeing things," he grunted. "But the guy took off in Baxter's plane, and climbed right up among those Fokkers. So help me, he buzzed around from one to the other like he was saying, 'Howdy,' to the pilots, then he went zooming up on top. The last I saw of him he was hell-bending it that way."

The redhead pointed toward the north and grimaced again.

"Can you beat it? He buzzed around them, and them throwing enough lead at him to break his wings. I tell you the guy's nuts! I didn't see him shoot back once. What the hell's Baxter got on his plane, a couple of camera guns?"

Jackson didn't say anything. For a couple of seconds he was just as mystified as the others. Then suddenly, a possible answer came to him. Obviously Harmon had plowed through those Fokkers hunting for von Trummer. When he hadn't found the German ace, he'd gone off hunting. Jackson stopped half way through the thought. Go off *where?* And *why* to the north? The German side of the war was to the *east*—not the north!

"I'll damn soon find out!" he suddenly barked aloud. Spinning, he jabbed a finger at a greaseball, "Gas my ship, and fill the ammo belts!" he ordered. "And do it all in two minutes. I'm taking off at the end of that time."

HE turned on his heel, raced over to the squadron office and dived in through the door. Grabbing the phone, he called the balloon squadron directly east of Thirty-Five's position. When the connection was made he found out that they had not seen a plane of the type and markings of Harmon's ship crossing over into Germany. He grunted his thanks, and put in a call to another balloon outfit farther north. There, he got the same answer. In all, he put through six calls and didn't learn a thing. Not a single ship of that description had been sighted along that section of the American Front.

Shoving back the phone, he scowled at it and tapped his fingertips impatiently on the desktop.

"Make a guess, Jackson," he murmured to himself. "Harmon started out to make himself the avenging hero, but the yellow in him came to the surface. Yeah, when he came to and found himself among those Fokkers, he just up and zoomed for Heaven and made tracks north . . . because he happened to be headed that way. Yeah. If he stuck around, he knew I'd get him, myself."

The harsh jangle of the field phone punctuated the last. Jackson dragged the instrument to him, and barked his presence into the mouthpiece.

"I say," came the English voice at the other end, "this is Captain Thornton, Adjutant of Thirty Squadron, R.F.C., speaking. Is your C.O. there, may I ask?"

"Speaking, Captain," Jackson grunted. "What can I do for you?"

"Nothing much, I fancy," said the other. "Just a check-up, don't you know. A chap has just landed here in one of your ships. Out of gas and ammo. Jolly well wants us to help him out. Glad to, of course, but one must make sure, you know, in these times. The chap says his name is Harmon. Lieutenant Harmon. . ."

"Harmon?" Jackson exploded into the phone.

"That's it," the other said. "It's quite

alright to give him the gas and ammo, what?"

"Hell, no!" Jackson roared, leaping to his feet. "Give him nothing! Hold him there! Thirty Squadron, you say? I'm on my way there, now. Don't let that man leave your field."

"Right-o!" the voice at the other end sang out. "We'll jolly well detain the beggar until you arrive."

Jackson flew throttle full out all the way to the British Squadron. As he coasted in to land, he saw Harmon's ship sitting in front of the center hangar. Several pilots and mechanics were standing grouped about it. Rolling straight up to the line, Jackson jumped out and hurried over to the group.

"I'm Jackson, C. O., of Thirty-Five," he said. "Where's that pilot?"

A major, obviously the C.O., stepped from the group.

"Damn well would like to know that, myself, sir," he said. "I'm Fraser. Who the devil is the man—a Hun spy? When we got your request to detain him he seemed to suspect as much. I mean, I gave the mechanics orders to stop filling his tank. They'd already started. Damned if he didn't race clear to the other end of the line. The Flight Sergeant was running up one of our ships. Harmon knocked the chap out of the way, and was in the ship and off before any of us could move."

"You mean, he took off?" Jackson yelped. "Stole one of your ships, too?"

"Dammit, yes!" the other barked. "Before we could get another warmed up, the blighter was hell and gone east, and lost in the clouds. I've called Balloons, of course, but as yet we've received no word. I say, what the devil is this, anyway?"

Jackson shook his head, and cursed inwardly. Then, suddenly, out of the darkness came the first flickering light of an idea—a possible answer to the reason Harmon had landed on the English drome.

"I don't know, sir," he said. "Headed east, eh? I'm going out that way to see if

I can find him. Sorry as hell for what he did. I'll see that he's punished, don't worry. First, though, I'm going to find him if I have to cover the whole damn Allied Front."

Leaving the Englishmen more convinced than ever that all Americans are just a little bit off stride, Jackson ran back to his ship, leaped into the pit and taxied out into the wind. The instant his wheels were clear he banked around and headed straight east. As he roared forward he slowly pounded one fist against the cockpit rim in tempo with his thoughts.

"Check!" he muttered. "He figures that getting von Trummer will mean something to other people, even if it doesn't mean a thing to me. Yeah, might even get back his rank. Skunks like him will try anything to cover up a mistake. So he headed for von Trummer's field and took a page out of von Trummer's book. *He* challenged von Trummer. And he named some place way up here . . . way out of our sector so that I wouldn't be able to stop him. By God, I wouldn't be at all surprised but what he used my name!"

Cursing aloud at the last, Jackson drove other thoughts from his head and bent forward over the stick and grimly searched the cloud-filled skies ahead. At the end of twenty minutes he was directly over No-Man's-Land, but in that time he had seen no other wings but his own. And as the minutes mounted, the sense of angry disappointment began to take charge of him. It was like spotting a needle in a haystack to try to find Harmon in that limitless expanse of clouds and sky that stretched to the four horizons. Yet, if his hunch was right—if Harmon had somehow arranged to meet von Trummer well clear of Thirty-Five's sector—then Harmon must be somewhere about. He . . .

THE sudden flash of sunlight on glossy wing surface, far over on the German side, suddenly froze Jackson in the seat.

Then he leaned even farther forward and stared hard, his breath clamped fast in his lungs. For several seconds he saw nothing. Then he saw the flash again, saw the plane. It was a Fokker, and the wings and fuselage were black. Even as Jackson spotted them, another set of wings flashed in the sunlight. A Camel came tearing down out of the clouds. Jetting flame spewed from its snout, but at the distance the yammer of the guns was very faint.

"Harmon and von Trummer!" Jackson roared and smashed the heel of his hand against the throttle.

Cursing his own ship on to greater speed, he tore across the sky toward the two crates that had veered in close and were milling furiously about, each pilot seeking an opening, an advantage. Suddenly, the black ship broke away in the opposite direction. The pilot dipped its nose and the ship went tearing southward in a long power dive. Impulsively Jackson lifted his eyes toward the clouds above and ahead of the diving plane. As he did he caught a flash glance of a cluster of black wings in those clouds.

"The usual trap, like Harmon said!" he cried aloud. "And by God, the fool's following von Trummer right into it! He . . .!"

He stopped short, for Harmon's plane, its Royal Flying Corps insignia now clearly visible, had suddenly pulled out of the dive on von Trummer's tail. The English Camel went up in a crazy zoom, then seemed to stagger off on one wing, and start to flutter earthward as though the pilot at its controls was dead.

"Von Trummer did wing him," Jackson muttered. "A lucky shot! Harmon will never send anybody else out on his own."

It was obvious von Trummer had suddenly realized that his bullets had gone home, for his Fokker came out of its wild dive and went careening around toward the helpless craft. Sight of the German's vulture gesture set the blood to pounding against Jackson's temples. He cursed

aloud and fired both of his guns, even though he was well over half a mile away.

"After all, Harmon's dead, you rat!" he bellowed.

But the words Jackson hurled out against the air were untrue. The "dead" pilot suddenly came alive—very much alive. The floundering English Camel ceased to flounder. It straightened out on an even keel, then whirled around and down like a flash of colored light. Von Trummer, zooming up for a dead-man kill, saw those guns spitting at him, and must have gone into a half faint of surprise and fear. In a wild maneuver, the Fokker fell over on one wing, and went slamming down into another wild power dive.

This time, though, the plane headed toward the American side of the lines, and although the German tried everything in a frantic effort to snake back underneath and lead Harmon into the range of the other Fokkers that were swarming down from out of the clouds, there wasn't a hope in hell of *that* happening. Both of Harmon's guns blasted continuous streams of hot lead into the white-tipped Fokker, raking it with a deadly fire from prop to tail skid. It seemed almost impossible that the German could remain alive. Yet somehow the man continued his wild dive toward the ground.

In one last desperate attempt to break away, von Trummer tilted his plane up on wing and tried to cut sharply across some tree-tops to the right. But even as the wings dropped, a shower of bullets from Harmon's guns caught the ship broadside. It seemed to stop dead in midair. Then the undercarriage caught in the topmost branches of the tree, "tripped" the forward motion of the ship, and seemed to fling it bodily out to the left. It struck on the edge of a small field, bounced twice, and then went cartwheeling along to a stop, a twisted and broken heap of wreckage.

No sooner had the wreckage stopped

sliding than Harmon banked around and went sliding down into the field himself.

"What the hell?" Jackson muttered, and pulled back his own throttle.

He had landed and reached the wreck just as Harmon pulled the limp figure of von Trummer clear. He bent over the man, felt for the heart, then straightened up and seemed to see Jackson for the first time. A glow leaped into his eyes.

"Wanted to make sure," the man said. "I didn't kill him, at that. His heart's still pumping. You figured out what I'd done, eh? Well, do your damndest, now. I said I'd get him, and I did—even though he'll probably still live, damn his soul."

A gurgling sound from the German turned them both around. Von Trummer's eyes were open, but there was death in their depths. He was looking at Harmon. Slowly, his blood-flecked lips twisted into a crooked smile.

"So we did finally meet, *ja*, *Hauptmann Harmon*? Your friend, the *Leutnant* Jackson, was a fool to accept that challenge I sent you. He admitted it a few moments before he died. You didn't know that, Captain, did you? Yes, he died in the crash of his plane on our side. It would have killed him sooner if we had tried to move him. *Ja*, the young fool. You didn't know that he'd accepted my challenge to *you* until later, did you? He said he'd left it in your room with a note—that you'd be over, yourself, if he failed. But . . . but it was many months before we did meet, *Hauptmann* Harmon. What happened?"

Harmon's face was black with rage.

"Shut up!" he grated, "or so help me God—"

"Wait!" Jackson barked, as he managed to snap himself loose from the stunned trance von Trummer's words had cast him into. "What's that about Jackson, von Trummer? He took a challenge sent to Harmon? Harmon didn't get it until later?"

"But, yes," the German said in a weak voice. "But who are you?"

"I'm Jackson's brother. I understood Harmon sent him out. Sent him into your trap."

The German tried to speak, and for a second or so nothing but blood trickled from his mouth.

"Sent him?" finally came the words. "Himmel, but why? *Hauptmann* Harmon was not there when my challenge was dropped. Your brother got it. He was a brave man—and a fool. He tried to do what I did not believe even so great a pilot as *Hauptmann* Harmon could do. To . . . defeat me in the air. But . . . but as you see . . . he has."

As the last word came off the bloody lips, von Trummer's face became distorted with pain. He arched his broken body, let out a gurgling moan, then fell back dead. For a long moment Jackson stared down at him, then he lifted his eyes to Harmon's face. The former acting C.O. shook his head.

"He didn't know what he was talking about," he said harshly. "The man was already half dead. He . . . he was thinking of something else."

Jackson trembled.

"You're lying!" he said savagely, and took hold of Harmon's arms. "Then you *didn't* send Bill out! You didn't even know he'd gone until later! But why? Why did you state that you sent him out?"

Damn you, Harmon, I've got to know the truth! I've—"

Jackson stopped short. His eyes widened, and he dropped his arms.

"God, what a fool I've been!" he choked. "What fools the judges of your trial were! What fools we've *all* been! Bill—Bill was your friend. I know he was a headstrong kid. And when you found out he'd disobeyed G.H.Q. orders, and yours—taken that new S.E. design over enemy territory—you wouldn't let that go against his name! Rather than let it be known that a dead man had—God, I've got to change all that!"

"You'll change nothing, Jackson!" Harmon blazed. "Do you think at this late date—? Dammit, no! I'm alone in the world. No family, or anything. When the war's over, what difference will it make? To me, none. But there'll always be Bill's memory. Your mother and father will have the record of what he did in the war. God, Jackson, no! Leave it as it is. I'm begging you to—for the sake of what Bill's friendship meant to me."

"All right," Jackson nodded. "But on two conditions. First, you beat the living hell out of me for the things I've said—and thought. And then, if I can still stand, you let me buy a *real* man a drink."

"I agree to the second condition right now," Harmon said. "But we'll have to forget about that first clause."

THE END



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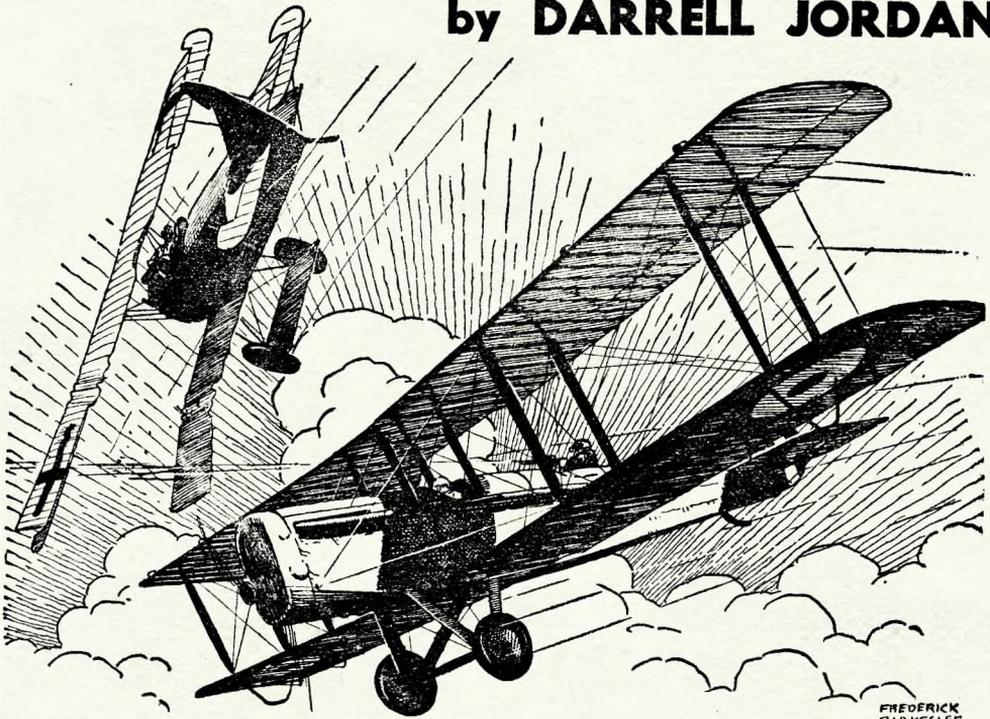


G-8 and His **BATTLE ACES**

April Issue on Sale March 1.

GLORY FOR SALE

by DARRELL JORDAN



What bony hand has reached down from the ceiling to rob the honor of Squadron Fifty-Five? Cloudy Day was the first to learn the answer, and he told it to the Boche with the short effective voice he carried in his guns!

CHAPTER ONE

The Devil's Due

HARSH chords from the battered piano in the corner rose to a final dismal peak, then echoed into silence. Through the odorous, smoke-filled confines of the dingy side street cafe drifted the babble of a half-dozen different languages. The rapid chatter of Frenchmen, the twang of Cockneys, the soft voices of Italians rose and fell and eddied. A group of French officers occupied a corner table, a bevy of bright-eyed, red-lipped girls giggling over their shoulders. Two poilus in horizon blue, bearded and

dour, stared somberly into their half-emptied glasses. In another corner three men, their hard faces mask-like, sat sipping drinks. Dressed as typical apaches, when they spoke at all it was in brief, clipped words. Their cold eyes swept the room, returned again and again to the solitary American in the cafe.

At the bar a tall, lantern-jawed Yank surveyed this cross-section of war-time Paris with somber eyes. If he was enjoying the evening, his gloomy face gave no evidence of it. The captain's bars on his shoulder and the wings on his tunic glittered dully in the shadowy light. Cloudy Day, pessimist de luxe, was winding up his Paris leave.

Cloudy finished his drink, nodded sadly at the mustachioed bartender to refill his glass. "It'll probably be my last one," he muttered morosely. "This is my last evening in Paris."

"But you weel be back," the barkeep expostulated. "When your next leave, it come, you weel remember Pierre's place, no?"

"Next leave!" Cloudy grunted. "I'm not that foolish, to count on another one. You know, Pierre, I've figured it all out. A flyer at the Front can expect, if he's lucky, to last six weeks. I'm living on borrowed time right now. I'll bet you ten bucks I get knocked down on my first patrol when I go back—if this rotten liquor of yours doesn't kill me first!"

"Ah, *non*, that is not the way to speak!" Pierre protested. "Be like us—be gay, forget tomorrow!"

The dour-faced American laughed hollowly. "That's okay for you flighty Frenchmen. But me, I look ahead. I can't see nothing to guffaw about. I'll bet you won't either, when a Zep comes over some night and drops a few eggs on this joint!"

Pierre shivered. Anything to get this crepe-hanging Yank out of the place before his funereal face queered the gayety of the others. He pulled a bottle from the back bar, thrust it hastily at Cloudy.

"Here, my friend, take this from Pierre! You are going now, *non*? Then listen . . ."

Pierre drew Cloudy close. "Those three men at the corner table; they have been watching you. Perhaps they mean to rob you when you leave—everyone knows that all Americans are rich! So be careful, my friend, at least until you are well away from here!"

Cloudy nodded disinterestedly. "It doesn't matter much; a knife in the back in a Paris alley, or a handful of Spandau slugs through your head at five thousand feet!"

He pocketed the wine bottle and moved

toward the door with exaggerated dignity. A few moments after he had passed through the door the three apaches rose and sauntered casually after him.

In the narrow alley Cloudy paused a moment uncertainly. The stuffy atmosphere of the cafe, added to the number of drinks he had taken, combined to make his feet act strangely.

"Second in command of the 55th," he thought dully. "Mike Sherry gone, Pete Morrow down in flames—" he shivered, wishing he'd taken one or two more drinks. By midnight he'd be back in it all, and his morbid nature assured him that he'd never have another leave. Each day that he lived seemed a miracle to Cloudy Day. The fact that he was one of the coolest, most skillful pilots on the Front never occurred to him as an explanation for surviving as long as he had.

A cool breeze blew down the alley and his head began to clear. He glanced at his watch and swore. His leave expired at midnight, and if he wasn't in his ship at Le Bourget within a half hour he'd have some tall explaining to do. He started on down the alley toward a dingy street. Paris was dark, save for the tricky illumination of the low-riding moon.

Fifty yards farther on his ears caught the slightest flicker of sound behind him. A bell of warning rang sharply in his brain, and instinctively he ducked, then whirled. The sudden move saved his life. From the shadows behind him a form was lunging. Naked steel glittered in the shadow's hand, described a shimmering arc just as Cloudy's foot shot out in a savage kick. There was an agonized howl, followed by a guttural oath.

As the fellow sprawled over the Yank's back, two more forms loomed from the darkness lining the alley. Silent as hunting tigers, and as deadly, they edged in. Cloudy's battle theory had always been that the best defense was a swift offense. He fainted as if to slide past the attackers,

then like a lunging bear he sprang straight at them.

One mauling fist caught the nearer thug squarely on the mouth. He went down, knife tinkling on the cobbled alley. Before Cloudy could straighten, the third killer, squealing in animal fury, slid close. Hot fire seared the American's ribs as he dodged. The knife was withdrawn, jerked back for a second stroke. Cloudy stabbed his own left hand for the knife wrist, gripped it desperately. His other hand lunged for the thug's throat. For a moment the two men stood frozen in a frenzied test of straining muscles.

Swerving into a lighter area, Cloudy recognized the man in his grasp as one of the three apaches in the cafe. But the fellow was growling oaths, not in French, but in guttural German!

The savage encounter had burned the last whisps of cobwebs from Cloudy's brain. He cursed his carelessness in leaving his service Colt in his hotel. The thought of that eight inches of cold steel slithering through his body nauseated and maddened him. He exerted every ounce of strength he possessed in a desperate effort to wring the weapon from the man's hands. The killer was powerful, possessing a strength that was amazing. But the American felt the fellow's straining muscles begin to give way. In another moment—Cloudy felt a hand jerk at his ankle, and kicked mercilessly. His heavy boot struck something that snapped and gave way. A strangled scream of agony shot through the gloom. Then—

A sodden weight struck Cloudy's back. A snarling voice rasped in his ear: "Take it, *schwein!* You are the last man!"

For a brief split-second the world stood still for Cloudy. As if in a horrible nightmare, he could see the picture of the first man he had downed, crawling to his feet, then leaping upon his quarry. He could envisage the uplifted knife, the moment of cruel triumph before the blade was sent

home. Unable to turn, to even move, Cloudy's back muscles writhed in anticipation of the final thrust. But it did not come! Instead he heard a dull thud, followed by a stifled groan.

Then a brisk voice crying: "*Nom du nom!* What have we here?"

With that load off his back Cloudy gave a final wrench, and the last killer's weapon clattered in the gutter. His balled right fist hit the man, sent him in a sodden heap against the alley wall. Panting, Cloudy whirled, his eyes confirming the fact that all three Huns were motionless. Then he straightened, staring at the newcomer.

The man flickered a flashlight over Cloudy, then held it so that the light reflected upon himself. The American saw a dapper French officer, pilot's wings glinting on his tunic. The Frenchman was in the act of returning a Ruby automatic to its holster. Then, calmly, he lighted a cigarette.

"A little alley murder, *non?*" he inquired lightly.

Cloudy grunted. "Yeah, you slammed that guy just in time. We better call the police—"

The other lifted a hand. "*Non!* Jacques Cartier doesn't wish to meet the police just now! Follow me, *mon ami!*"

SIMULTANEOUSLY a police whistle shrilled a short distance away, followed immediately by an answer. In the dim oblong marking the mouth of the alley the caped outline of a *gendarme* appeared. The officer shouted a harsh command in French. Cartier grasped Cloudy's arm.

He whirled, running lightly down the alley away from the street. Cloudy followed instinctively.

"Do you know where you're goin'?" Cloudy grunted.

"Cartier knows every alley in Paris," the other replied confidently.

At the end of a half hour Cloudy was inclined to agree. Up and down dark alleys, plunging through dingy back rooms, stumbling over debris in yards and courts, Cartier led the way with the sure instinct of a cat. A half dozen times whistles shrilled and caped *gendarmes* fired at them hastily.

Finally, gasping and puffing, they slowed near a dimly lighted thoroughfare.

"We've thrown them off for a time," the Frenchman assured Cloudy. "Now I'll leave you. If I were picked up you might get the same treatment as I, for being with me."

Cloudy shook his head obstinately. "Nothing doing, fella. You saved my bacon back there, and it means somethin' to me. I'm stopping at the Lebaullt, on the *Rue St. Martin*. I'll get you up to my room, and we can talk this over."

Cartier shrugged light-heartedly. "As you say, *monsieur*. I know the place; we can reach it by back streets."

Cloudy lighted a battered cigarette. "Did I tell you those thugs were Huns? Well, they were. I can't figure that, nor the crack one of them made about me being the last one, or something of the sort."

"Huns? *Sacre!* Hun agents attacking Allied officers on the streets of Paris?" Cartier raised black eyebrows. "That is peculiar, *mon ami*. That is, unless you're a G-2 man."

Cloudy shook his head. "I'm just a common flyer, second in command of the 55th."

"The 55th? *Mon Dieu*, we are only down the line five kilometers. I am Jacques Cartier, flight officer of the Second Nieuport *Chasse* group—or did you know that? Hello—what's this?"

They were a half block from the Lebaullt. At Cartier's sharp exclamation, Cloudy peered through the fog. Fifty yards ahead of them a little knot of scrambling figures obstructed the side-

walk. He made out the uniforms of the Parisian police, and a bedraggled figure in their midst.

A voice came booming through the gloom, a distinctly British voice. "I say, you blighters! This is a bally outrage! I happen to be Sir Ronald Sheffield!"

A chorus of excited French conveyed the impression that the *gendarmes* didn't care if he was the Prince of Wales. Cartier quickened his step, black eyes snapping with eagerness.

"How did I know the silly ass was a cabinet minister?" the English voice belated. "He made a off-color remark about His Majesty, God bless him! I don't care if both his eyes are black!"

A club rose and fell. There was a grunt, and instantly a policeman shot backward from the group. He struck the sidewalk and stayed there. Immediately the protesting Britisher was the center of an angry circle of determined French police. Cartier grabbed Cloudy by the arm.

"Come on, my friend. Likeable fellows, these English, *non?* Besides, the *gendarmes* here are getting altogether too officious!"

Cloudy needed no second urging. The next moment the two descended upon the unsuspecting *gendarmes* like an avalanche. Cartier's pistol barrel slammed neatly alongside one officer's jaw just as Cloudy lifted a second from his feet with a ripping uppercut. Both officers immediately fell into peaceful slumber. As the remaining pair drew back dazedly, Cartier grabbed the bewildered Englishman and propelled him bodily into the gloom of a nearby alley. Rushed along by the two allies, Sheffield was hustled down one alley and up another, then through a maze of doors that eventually gave upon the rear entrance of the Lebaullt.

"Confound it, where are you fellows taking me?" Sheffield demanded dazedly.

"Shut up, Ronald," Cloudy ordered gruffly. "Let me handle this, now."

With the Englishman following docilely, Cloudy led the way into the hotel, past a sleepy concierge who merely opened one eye as they went by, then up a long flight of dark stairs. Cloudy unlocked the door to a third floor room and shoved his companions inside. A moment later he had lighted the room and found three glasses. Dragging the miraculously still unbroken bottle of wine from his pocket, he filled the glasses and passed them out. Then he lighted a smoke and stared gloomily at the ill-assorted pair.

In the bright light Cartier looked more dapper than ever. A neatly trimmed black mustache bristled over a firm, wide mouth. Snapping black eyes scrutinized the room merrily.

Sir Ronald Sheffield, still a bit dazed, stared vacuously back at Cloudy. His blonde hair was rumpled, one ruddy cheek was bruised. He was twenty-five, looked thirty. He sniffed the glass, suddenly beamed.

"Not bad port, you know! But wasn't it silly of those beggars, getting so upset? All I did—well, you see, I was at a banquet. Had a few too many, and all that sort of thing, perhaps. Anyway, this blighter passed a remark about the King which I didn't like. Not the thing to do, you know, not cricket. I swung on him, gave him a pair of black eyes. How was I to know he was a Cabinet member? Anyway, he'll be able to see in a few days. But everyone got awfully excited!"

Cartier was doubled over, shaking with laughter. Sheffield produced a monocle and eyed him wonderingly.

"He knocks a Cabinet minister down, and wonders why they get excited!" Cartier howled. "Sir Ronald, you are a—what you say—a card!"

Sheffield frowned at Cloudy's mournful face, suddenly leaned forward anxiously. "You've had bad news?" he demanded. "Perhaps a death in the jolly old family?"

"Don't mind him, Ronald," Cartier ex-

plained. "I fancy that's the way the Yankee always looks. Right, Captain?"

Cloudy looked pained at the levity. "This is serious," he grunted. "I see I got to ride herd on you guys."

He turned to Cartier. "What were you dodging the cops for?"

The Frenchman shrugged. "A matter of disobeying orders. I fought with my C.O., came to Paris A.W.O.L. There'll be the devil to pay when I go back. But what of that? We only live once, and in this War, perhaps not very long!"

"There may be some unpleasantness when I rejoin my outfit," Sheffield drawled.

"Unpleasantness!" Cloudy snorted. "You'll be lucky if they don't stand you up in front of a firing detail!"

"By Jove! Do you really think so?" Sheffield shifted worriedly.

"Right," Cloudy said grimly. "Here's my idea. You guys come back to the 55th with me until this can be straightened out. I can fix it—maybe. How about it?"

Cartier leaped to his feet, saluted with a debonair flourish. "Perfect, Yankee!"

Sheffield grunted, seemed to be almost visually making an effort to think. Then he grinned. "Ripping!" He thrust out his hand. "Hands across the sea, and all that kind of rot, what?"

Looking at the two of them, Cloudy's glum face broke into an unwilling smile. His hand went out, gripped Cartier's, then Sheffield's. "Come on, you mugs! I'm always sticking my neck out!"

Less than an hour later a Spad, a Nieuport, and a Camel took off hurriedly from Le Bourget.

CHAPTER TWO

Midnight Massacre

RRACING through the cold night air, Cloudy felt a vague premonition. He told himself savagely that nothing could

be wrong, yet the feeling persisted. Finally he yielded to it. Morbid and pessimistic by nature, never had one of these queer hunches proved false. Cloudy muttered an oath and scanned the sky vigilantly. On either side of him his two new friends flew faultlessly. The attack in Paris worried him. Why had he been singled out? There was no doubt but that the killers had been Huns. What had that one meant by saying: "You are the last one"?

Even the ground below seemed wrong. Guns muttered and growled where Cloudy had never seen them before. Near the 55th's drome the clouds cleared away and the moon peered down boldly. Cloudy's eyes picked up the familiar landmarks and his arm waved a signal to his companions. Obediently they banked and turned with him. Suddenly the gloomy Yank stiffened into startled rigidity.

Over the field next to the 55th's drome appeared two irregular lines that moved steadily forward!

"Infantry!" he snapped. "But what the hell—!"

A sudden blinding shaft of light shot up from behind the lines of soldiers. The searchlight caught the Spad, held it transfixed, throwing the tri-colored cocards into bold relief. Simultaneously a savage burst of machine gun fire spat up. Slugs ripped through the Spad's wings, whined dangerously close to Cloudy's head.

"The damned fools!" He slammed the stick forward. "Firing at their own ships—"

The next moment his hand shot to the Vickers' triggers. Those weren't doughboys! Around the base of the searchlight he caught distinct glimpses of coal-scuttle helmets. Boche! Instantly the answer flashed through his mind. The Allied lines had been forced back; and he hadn't been notified! The Germans were moving up, moving in on the 55th's field! But did the 55th know that?

Hell, they must! Cloudy banked, ripped swiftly across the field. There was the 55th's drome, and in the moonlight ant-like figures were scurrying frenziedly. Obviously something had slipped. The field had not yet been abandoned, and Boche infantry not a half mile away! Swearing luridly, Cloudy crossed the field. Why weren't ships taking the air? What was the matter with those dopes, anyway? But there were no ships on the line. He dropped a landing flare, and as the light burst forth he flew down through it, pointing frantically. He saw men nod, redouble their efforts. Trucks were being loaded desperately. The men of the 55th at last realized their danger, at any rate.

But a glance told him that they would never escape before those gray-green lines swept onto the field. Cloudy shot up in a zooming roar. He gestured to Sheffield and Cartier, saw them nod understandingly.

The three ships whirled as one, went thundering back toward the oncoming Huns. Cloudy led the way in a vicious dive. For a moment the searchlight picked him up and held the Spad transfixed. Then he was out of it, leveling, sweeping down that long line, both Vickers jibbering madly. Under the murderous straffing men melted in dark heaps. The lines wavered, halted. Behind him came Cartier and Sheffield, dealing out a deadly stream of lead. The Hun lines staggered back.

Then up again, through a hell of machine gun and rifle fire. Down, down, motors screaming, guns racketing savagely. The Hun wave dropped, fell back, came surging gamely on. Stolid men in gray-green shuffled forward to take the places of the fallen. Inexorably the wall crawled across the field, closer to the drome.

Now trucks were roaring away from the drome. A fiery crimson glare lighted the sky as hangar after hangar was fired by the retreating Americans. A cold hand

of dread lay on Cloudy's heart. Where were the men of the 55th? Where were the Spads? Major Morton, Billings, Travers and the rest? Why weren't they up in the air?

That icy dread inspired Cloudy to fanatic fury. Again and again, until he lost count, he sent the Spad driving down at the Huns until his wings were ribbons. They had reached the border of the field, now they were creeping out upon it. The last truck swayed past the burning hangars. The 55th was leaving—save for one man. Cloudy saw a dark shape fall from the truck's tailgate, saw that the man was unnoticed by his companions. Cloudy's lips drew back in a snarl. He could imagine what the enraged Boche would do to that luckless fellow.

Without pausing to count the cost, Cloudy sent the Spad swaying downward. Rifle fire slammed through the fuselage, banged against the motor. But the wheels struck, bounced, dropped again. The Spad slowed as German infantrymen lunged toward it. Cloudy yelled at the lone abandoned American. The fellow got up, ran desperately toward the waiting ship. A mechanic, dressed in greasy dungarees, he threw his body frantically on the wing, grasped for wires and struts. Cloudy sent the crate booming back into the sky. Some angel of mercy protected him then, for the streams of lead from the ground missed both the pit and the huddled figure on the wing.

Why hadn't Cartier and Sheffield come down to help? The next moment Cloudy knew why. A dark-winged thing came screaming past, spitting lead in torrents. He jockeyed, spun the Spad around, praying that the mech could hold on. The ship's nose went down, and as the Fokker banked to come back, a ripping hail of steel slashed it viciously. The Boche ship wavered, nosed down. Looking up, Cloudy saw Cartier and Sheffield battling recklessly with a trio of Fokkers. He sent

the Spad up, just as Cartier caught one of the Huns squarely. As the Fokker flared into flame the remaining two drew back hastily.

Cloudy swung alongside, signalled frantically. Cartier waved, and Nieuport and Camel fell in on either side. Cloudy headed back toward the new Yank lines, his world in ashes around him. Even then he remained cool enough to guide the way to a small field where he had once landed, and which he felt sure must be behind the shifted lines.

A HALF hour later they landed in the brilliant moonlight, in a field barely large enough to accommodate the three ships. The others came forward as Cloudy helped the shivering mechanic from the wing.

"*Mon Dieu!*" Cartier gasped. "A fine homecoming, *mon ami!* It is clear enough to me. The lines fell back; we were dodging the *gendarmes* in Paris and were not notified. But your friends at the field; what about them?"

"That's what I'm wondering," Cloudy said grimly. "This poor devil is half frozen and half scared to death. I guess we can chance a fire."

Fifteen minutes later, beside a glowing campfire, Cloudy drained the last of the wine through the mech's ashen lips.

"Come on, Casey," he urged. "Tell me about it."

The man choked and gazed around wildly. "Gone," he croaked. "All the flying officers, gone! Turned yellow, they did! Ran from von Lunn! No officers left. . . . H.Q. didn't warn us that the trenches had been abandoned on both sides of us . . . wires down . . . no messages . . . no officers left . . . three days now!"

Cloudy shook him roughly. "Snap out of it, Casey! You know I've been in Paris for two weeks. What's happened?"

The rescued man made an obvious at-

tempt to get a grip on his shattered nerves. "We found out the Boches were coming just before you fellows showed up. If it hadn't been for you, half of us would have been captured. Colonel Bragg, at H.Q. wouldn't have cared. He's gonna court-martial all of us. He said so two days ago. But here's the way it happened.

"Eight days ago, Cap'n Riley and two of the others went out on a three ship dawn patrol. Accordin' to observers, they met two of Count von Lunn's Fokkers over Rhiner Valley—the Valley of Death! And would you believe it—our fellas turned and ran for home like scared kids! The Fokkers overtook 'em in a little while and shot all three down!"

Cloudy's fingers closed on Casey's arm until the man yelped with pain. The gloomy Yank's eyes were bleak as agate. "Go on! What then?"

"That was the beginnin'," Casey gulped. "Next mornin' the C.O. and four ships flew over there, lookin' for the Fokkers. An' the same thing happened! They met some Huns over the Valley, turned tail, an' run for home! Von Lunn got 'em, all four! Then he starts dropping insultin' notes, askin' why our guys won't fight! That burnt up the fellows that was left. B Flight swore they'd get his scalp. They went out yesterday mornin'. Well, the reports come in from the observation posts. They met von Lunn, they turned tail like yella pups and run fer home. They're . . . dead, now! Then last night Colonel Bragg sent two cars full of M.P.s up to the field. They arrested the four men as was left, took 'em back and court-martialed them for cowardice. An' Bragg said to hell with the rest of us!"

Casey finished his tale of a dishonored squadron, tears streaming down his face. Cloudy whirled fiercely on his companions. His face was working, his fists clenched.

"It's a damned lie!" he snarled hoarse-

ly. "Those boys didn't run, any of 'em! They weren't that kind! There's some mistake, and by God I'm going to find out what it is!"

"If you say it is a mistake that's good enough for me, *mon ami*," Cartier said quietly. "A mistake it is, Cloudy."

"By Gad, yes!" Sir Ronald blurted. His eyes weren't vacant now, they were hard and bright. "You Yanks have your failings . . . but I never saw one run from a fight!"

Cloudy turned to Casey. "Hit over there to your right and you'll strike a road," he said quietly. "Follow it back and you'll hit H.Q. eventually. But you haven't seen us, understand?"

Cloudy watched Casey's figure shamble away, his brain whirling madly. He thought of the dead, and of the living who might better be dead. A squadron ruined, the survivors indicted for cowardice. The clean record of the 55th splashed with dishonor. No matter what the evidence, something was wrong. No man of the 55th had ever run from von Lunn. Standing there, Cloudy swore a silent oath.

He turned back to the others. "I'm not reporting in," he began abruptly. "They'd only slap me in a cell, or transfer me to another outfit. I'm going into this thing! The Old Boy with the scythe has been looking for me for a long time, anyway. You guys better go home, take your medicine. No need for three of us to commit suicide."

"You mean quit?" Cartier gave his mustache a carefree whirl. "*Non, non*. I wouldn't miss this for the world. I agree, Cloudy, something is what you call . . . haywire, eh? I'm sticking along. How about you, Sheffield?"

"Me?" Sheffield blinked, glared indignantly. "Haw, you blighters need a guardian, and I accept the job. You know—mustn't twist the British lion's tail, and so forth. What say, Lieutenant Day? A minor League of Nations? Righto, old

man! And now, things have been happening rather rapidly for me; you know, we Sheffields, while of sterling stuff, have never been much on the brainy side!"

Sheffield lay down beside the fire and almost instantly was snoring peacefully. Cartier laid a hand on Cloudy's rigid shoulder. "Rotten, this thing that has hit your outfit. Sheffield feels it too, in his own dumb way."

Cloudy shrugged, and the next moment became his old dour self. Only the hidden misery in his eyes was evidence of his inner torment.

"Well, this seems to clear up that attack in Paris. It looks like von Lunn wanted to make a clean sweep of the 55th. He found out where I was, and sent killers after me. One thing is fairly sure; Count von Lunn, the slimy devil, will probably take over our old drome for his own outfit. I'm going to sneak back there on foot. There are some things I want to get, if possible. We've still got half-full gas tanks, but we need ammo."

"I'll go too," Cartier offered instantly. "You, my crazy Yank, are apt to go berserk if you see von Lunn, and get yourself killed!"

Cloudy shook his head, his eyes hard flecks of ice. "No, one man has a better chance. Besides, I know the layout. If I'm not back by dawn, you guys blow—I'll be finished. As for von Lunn—I can wait for him until I can get him right!"

A MOMENT later Cloudy had slipped away into the gloom. The problem of crossing the lines worried him not at all. Newly established, there would be plenty of holes through which he could slip. The new German position could not be far in advance of the old drome, and following that reasoning Cloudy stuck to the nearest highway until he had passed the point where the Yank doughboys were digging in. Then he swung sharply left until he struck a narrow, transverse

ravine. Small chance that Hun troops would have that blocked as yet.

He followed the ravine for several miles, occasionally making use of a pocket flash Cartier had given him. Twice he narrowly escaped capture by roving bands of Boche raiding parties. Once certain he had passed the infantry lines, he cut boldly cross country. Another hour's steady walking, cautiously avoiding all roads and open fields, brought him to the patch of woods that surrounded the 55th's old drome. He paused there, listening. Several times he caught glimpses of screened lights, and the drone of Mercedes overhead suggested that von Lunn was using sky sentries to guard against a Yank bombing raid.

Silently Cloudy crossed a corner of the field, carefully avoiding the huge areas of black ashes which were all that remained of the hangars. By now mechs were probably rigging some sort of canvas shelters for the ships until new hangars could be built. But the retreating members of the 55th had not had time to burn the barracks, or the farmhouse that had served Major Morton as quarters and Operations Office. Here, beneath drawn curtains, Cloudy glimpsed a flicker of light.

Moving as cautiously as a hunting cat, the Yank reached a back window and peered through the narrow slit between shade and sill. An oil lamp rested on a table, throwing dancing shadows over the smoky walls. In the fireplace embers cracked sullenly. At the Major's old desk sat a grossly fat German, huge folds of flesh protruding above his tightly buttoned collar. Porcine eyes glittered, almost hidden in fleshy sockets. The office chair groaned beneath the vast bulk as the man shifted, thrust a cigarette into his thick lips.

Count von Lunn! Cloudy's fingers closed savagely over the butt of his Colt, but the next moment he had fought down

that first burst of killing rage. Then he watched and listened, senses coldly alert.

Von Lunn puffed furiously at the cigarette almost hidden in his moon face. When he spoke the naked skin on his scalp twitched with each word. His voice was high, squeaky, horribly suggestive of the ugly squeal of a snarling rat. So intent on von Lunn had Cloudy been, that not until now did he notice a second German on the other side of the desk, almost hidden by the Count's bulk. This second Hun, lath-thin with a tiny blonde mustache, was answering some question of von Lunn's. Their voices carried, faintly, but clearly enough to be discernible.

"—hangars should be finished in a couple of days," the subordinate reported. "The barracks are intact, as you know, and the men are already selecting their quarters. We found a supply of food stuffs, a few plane parts, and some ammunition. The Vickers ammo we cannot use, of course, in our Spandaus. I have had it stored in one of the vacant hutments. *Ach*, Excellency, your plan has worked like a charm!"

"Of course," von Lunn squealed. "My plans always work! This one—well, hasn't it already lifted our list of victories nearly to the top? Am I not the second ranking ace in the Imperial Air Service? *Ja*, and by another week I will be Germany's ace of aces! Just one more week! Five ships of the *verdammt* 55th Squadron did I down myself! Next we strike at the French Second Group!"

"That is the supreme touch," the other officer chortled. "Already the 55th is scorned as an outfit of cowards! Soon the entire Air Service will be branded the same way, if our plans work. The great von Lunn! You are being rated a great ace, but only a few of us know the truth, know that—"

"Silence, Kaller!" Von Lunn squealed like a trodden rodent, his face purpled with choleric rage. "You insolent *schwein!*

You dare to make sport of me and I'll make you sorry you were born!"

The other man shrank back. "Pardon, *Excellenz*," he muttered. "I meant nothing! After all, the credit should go to you. It is your plan, your brains. When will—it—be moved?"

"Tomorrow night. Until then it waits in what the Yankees are beginning to call Death Valley. If I—"

A step nearby jerked Cloudy's attention away. He turned, just as a soldier came around the corner. The man uttered a startled exclamation, then Cloudy was at his throat like a ravening tiger. The sentry's Mauser fell from his hands and the cry of alarm he tried to voice died in his throat. Gripping the Hun by the throat with his left hand, the Yank jerked out his Colt. As his arm went up the Hun twisted, sank his teeth viciously in Cloudy's wrist. He slashed down with the gun, eased the limp body to the ground. Ruefully he wiped the blood from his arm,

"Probably get hydrophobia from that," he muttered glumly. "Well, if I'm gonna get my junk and get back before dawn—"

The office door slammed and feet strode off in the darkness. Von Lunn sat at the desk alone, and for a moment Cloudy considered the idea of attempting to force an explanation from the Hun. Reluctantly he abandoned the thought. The task would be almost impossible to accomplish without raising an alarm and ruining any faint chance he had of clearing the 55th.

Most of the activity on the field seemed centered around the hangar area. Accordingly, Cloudy drifted through the shadows down the line of barracks until he reached the one he had formerly used. It seemed empty now, and he slid inside, carefully screening the light of his flash. The place had been ransacked, but Cloudy moved immediately to a spot beneath his bunk and probed until his hand discovered the old hiding place. He yanked out the small kitsack and turned toward the door.

Simultaneously a tall figure loomed in the opening. For a moment Cloudy stared into the startled eyes of a tall German pilot. Without a word the fellow snatched out a Luger. At the same split-second Cloudy's own Colt flipped up and roared. Both shots sounded at the same instant and lead burned across Cloudy's arm as the Hun sagged slowly to the floor, his face wearing an expression of ghastly surprise.

Someone shouted far down the field, and running footsteps sounded faintly. Cloudy lighted a match, held it to the wick of the lamp on the table. Then he dragged the dead German into a chair, removed the clip from the Luger.

Hurriedly he thrust a rag into the dead man's fingers, then slipped through the door an instant before several officers pounded into the room. Crouching outside the thin wall, Cloudy could hear every word.

"*Mein Gott!* It's Martz—dead!"

"The careless fool!" another growled. "Look, cleaning his gun, and shoots himself! See, the clip is out, one cartridge fired, and there's the cleaning rag.

Cloudy smiled grimly at the success of his quick stage-setting, then set off for the last hut. Here, he reasoned, the Vickers ammo was most likely to be stored.

Fifteen minutes later he slipped away from the field, his shoulders draped with loaded ammo belts. Looking back at the familiar field, he found himself blinking. All of the 55th gone . . . except those five men awaiting court-martial. Then, doggedly, he began the task of slipping back across the lines.

CHAPTER THREE

Into the Valley of Death

DAWN was lightening the eastern sky when Cloudy slipped through the screen of brush that concealed the valley

field where he had left Sheffield and Cartier. The Englishman came forward to greet him, but Cartier was nowhere in sight, nor was his Nieuport. Cloudy recalled the faint sound of a motor which he had heard shortly before reaching the field.

"Where's Cartier?" he demanded sharply.

Sheffield blinked. "Haw, so there you are! The bally Frog got nervous when you didn't show up, insisted on taking up his crate and having a look for you. Mentioned something about flying over some Valley of Death, too!"

"The crazy fool!" Cloudy swore bitterly. "I told him to wait until dawn. Here, help me get this bus wound up. I'm going after him!"

"Both of us," Sheffield offered instantly. "After all, Yank, I'd like to be counted in, you know."

"Nothing doing. Chances are neither Cartier or I will be back. If we aren't, you go to H.Q. and tell Bragg this is all one of von Lunn's schemes!"

Sheffield scratched his head. "Haw, let's see, now. Tell Bragg . . . But what shall I tell him, old chap? After all, we've never met, you know!"

Cloudy groaned in despair, fed the idling Spad the gun. The ship scudded down the field, to rise with a swift rush of wings into the gray dawn. He flew low, holding the ship on a dead course for the valley. A growing feeling possessed him that Cartier was heading toward certain death. How or why, Cloudy couldn't tell, but seeing again in his mind Cartier's reckless smiling face, the Yank tried to urge another notch of speed from the already wide open Hisso.

Machine guns and one lone archie spat fire at him as he roared above von Lunn's drome. Cloudy held his course grimly, his eyes searching the ground. The Spad's wings flickered over the old German trenches, then he picked up the broad

expanse of von Lunn's *old* drome. Abruptly Cloudy cut to the right, swung down until the Spad was headed directly toward a narrow wooded valley, perhaps five miles in length. The Valley of Death!

Simultaneously he picked up the outline of another ship, swinging back up the valley, and in the gray light he caught a momentary glimpse of Allied cocardes. Something about the careless, debonair way in which the ship was being flown convinced him that the pilot was Cartier. The Frenchman reached the end of the Valley and turned back. At the same moment a Fokker appeared from the direction of the lines, came lancing straight in at Cartier. He swung to meet it eagerly.

The Hun slammed past Cloudy without appearing to notice him, so close that the American could distinguish the grossly fat form in the pit. Count von Lunn! Cloudy's pulse quickened. Cartier should be able to handle the big German! Cloudy hesitated, watching. The odds were even; better to stay back a moment to make sure other Fokkers were not following the Hun.

Von Lunn came down in a sweeping dive, straight at Cartier's tail. Tracer flickered from the Fokker's Spandaus. Cartier started to turn, then—Cloudy gasped in stunned bewilderment. Cartier was swinging toward the Yank lines; Cartier was running! The Nieuport was gunning toward home like a frightened dog, and Cartier was looking back over his shoulder at the pursuing von Lunn!

The Yank watched, frozen into rigid immobility. God! What had Cartier seen—what had changed him in an instant from a reckless dare devil to a shamelessly running coward? Cloudy knew now that this was what the pilots of the 55th had done, but not until this instant had he been able to credit the fact.

He fought himself out of that stunned lethargy just as a storm of Spandau slugs

caught up with the Nieuport. Lead hailed over the doomed ship in a steady stream, and suddenly the Nieuport staggered, lurched, flung its tail high. Then it went down, a motionless body, draped over the cockpit edge. Down, until the screen of trees in the Valley mercifully hid the end.

Cloudy choked, mist clogging his goggles. He'd have gambled his life on Cartier's gameness, and now—? Von Lunn had turned, was streaking away. Cloudy flung the Spad in furious pursuit. Suddenly the stick tightened in his hand and the Spad skidded. Frantically he fought to get it back on the course.

"Controls jammed," he thought, sweat bursting out on his face. Down, down, in that crazy fall. Then, suddenly, the controls began to function again. The Spad responded, lifted skyward. But there was no sign of von Lunn. Reluctantly, his brain still reeling with horror, Cloudy turned back toward the lines.

Sheffield ambled forward to meet him as the Spad rolled to a stop back at the tiny field. "Did you find him?" he asked anxiously.

Cloudy's dour face was as expressionless as a block of granite. "Yeah, I found him," he said harshly. "And lost him again."

In a few terse sentences he explained Cartier's last flight. "That Frog wasn't the sort to run from an equal fight, any more than the boys in the 55th," he concluded grimly. "Sheffield, von Lunn has some devilish trick that accomplishes these things; something that makes his victims seem yellow!"

"Haw, but that's impossible, old man! I don't understand—Cartier goes out to pick a fight with von Lunn, then when he sees him, he runs and is shot down! The whole thing has my bally head whirling!"

"Never mind about your head," Cloudy said decisively. "We're going on an errand!"

"We're what? Where are we going?"

"Headquarters! I'm gonna try to get Bragg to hold off on that court-martial until we can find out something. We're going to have a talk with the Wing Commander!"

"But . . . but," Sheffield protested feebly, "you'll be held yourself! He may ring you in on the thing!"

Cloudy shrugged. "Probably. I've always wondered what it would feel like to stare a firing squad in the face. The folks back home always said I'd come to a bad end, so maybe this is it. They'll likely grab you too, for beating up that French official. I'll bet that's a guillotine offense in France. That big knife coming down—"

"I hope I never see you when you're feeling blue, Yank!" Sheffield groaned. "Lead on. I never could follow the hounds or stand whiskey and soda. An Englishman who can't do those things might as well be dead!"

Five minutes later both Spad and Camel were in the air, cutting diagonally back toward Wing H.Q. Far away, the faint gash in the line of hills that was the Valley of Death loomed grimly.

CLLOUDY led the way to the spot formerly occupied by H.Q., and by following the boggy highway back for ten miles they struck the new field. Ships were landing and taking off busily, and the field was swarming with officers as the Spad and Camel slanted into land. Cloudy collared a sergeant mechanic before leaving the ships, and gave instructions for them to be gassed and checked for an instant take-off. Then he strode across the field toward the H.Q. building, with Sheffield following worriedly at his heels.

An important staff lieutenant barred their way in a bustling outer room. "Sorry, sir, but Colonel Bragg is very busy, can't be disturbed."

Cloudy jabbed a long finger into the subaltern's ribs. "Sonny, you tell the Colonel that Captain Day, of the 55th Pursuits, is here to see him!"

The orderly stared at Cloudy curiously, but something in the tall flyer's face and voice choked back the retort he was apparently ready to make. Meekly, he disappeared through a doorway into an inner room. A moment later he was back.

"Colonel Bragg will see you at once. This way, please."

Cloudy stepped confidently into a large, cluttered office with the Englishman at his heels. The walls were covered with pin-decorated sector maps and filing cases. The Wing C.O. looked up from the huge, battered desk where he sat.

"Well?" he demanded harshly.

After one glance at Bragg's face Cloudy's hopes sank. The C.O. was a blocky, middle-aged man with hard, expressionless features. Eyes as cold and bright as polished steel surveyed the world with a hostile glare, and the thin lips and shock of flaming red hair did not indicate a personality easily persuaded.

"You are a member of the 55th?" Bragg asked again. "I'm sorry to have overlooked you, Captain. You have come to join the rest of the yellow rats that are imprisoned here?"

"I was in Paris on leave when this trouble started," Cloudy said stiffly. "I returned last night, and—"

"Then why haven't you reported in?" Bragg cut in swiftly. "What have you been doing in the meantime? And who is this officer with you? Don't tell me—I think I see a startling resemblance to a certain provost-marshal's circular. Something about one of our English cousins who attacked a French official! The French authorities will be glad to hear of this!"

Bragg's hand slid toward a desk bell. Cloudy stepped forward. "If the Colonel

will be good enough to wait one moment," he grated.

The C.O.'s hand halted. "Well? You'll have to talk fast. I've a certain matter to clear up this morning."

"Colonel, regardless of what you think, and of the evidence you have, I know that the men of the 55th did *not* run from von Lunn! I've been investigating, and learned enough to know that von Lunn tricked them in some way—"

"Tricked them!" Bragg's voice was bitterly scornful. "He buffaloes them, you mean! What could he have done? Hasn't it been proved that on four separate occasions you fellows turned and ran from him?—after the 55th had had specific orders to keep German aircraft on their own side of the lines? Do you know that because the 55th flunked its duty our lines had to fall back?"

He rose, sent his chair reeling with a savage kick. "The conduct of the 55th cost us a thousand men and five miles of territory. Yet you come whining to me with a plea for the yellow dogs' hides! Well, let me tell you this, Captain Day. Five members of the 55th are alive. Yesterday afternoon a court found them guilty of cowardice in the face of the enemy and refusal to carry out orders. The sentence of the court was—death! At nine tomorrow morning they will be shot by a firing squad!"

He whirled suddenly on the two horrified pilots. "As for you, I am holding Lieutenant Sheffield for the French military police; and you, Captain Day, are under arrest pending further investigation!"

Bragg stepped toward his desk, with the obvious intention of summoning orderlies. A sudden, hard voice stopped him. "I wouldn't do that, Colonel!"

Bragg looked up, to stare into the muzzle of Cloudy's .45 Colt. "What . . . what is this?"

"Don't touch that bell, Colonel! Unless

you want your insides spattered all over that map on the wall!"

Cloudy spoke to Sheffield without removing his eyes from the Colonel's apoplectic face. "Look him over, Ronald. If he packs a gun, take it!"

"But . . . but . . . I say, old man, you really can't do this!" Sheffield's mouth hung open, his face wore an expression of horrified bewilderment. "Holding a gun on a superior officer! Why, the bally blighter can have you arrested!"

Cloudy's voice cracked. "Get busy, Limey!"

Sheffield stepped forward, took an automatic from Bragg's belt. "We'll get shot for this, you know!"

"You're damned right!" Bragg gritted. "Don't be a fool, Day! I'll have you both up before a squad if you go one step farther with this outrage!"

"Here's the step," Cloudy said coolly. "Bragg, maybe you'll do those things to us, and maybe not. I half expected I'd have to do this when I came. There are five innocent men who are going to die unless we stop it. I know you well enough to realize that no proof we could bring to you would satisfy you. Okay, you're going on a little trip with us. Before I'm through, I'm gonna *show* you what happened to the 55th!"

"You . . . kidnap a colonel?" Sheffield shivered, then after one glance at Cloudy's iron face he shrugged. "Right ho, old man. Kidnapped he is!"

"Now listen, Colonel! You're going out of here between us, and you're going to keep your mouth shut. One bleat from you, and I'll let you have it! My gun will be in my pocket, lined on that big belly of yours. If I'm shot down the next minute—well, I'll be with the rest of the boys, and that's okay. Let's go!"

Colonel Bragg was far from being a coward; neither was he foolhardy. Conviction of the burning determination of this grim-faced man seized him. His

voice shook with outraged dignity as he stepped toward the door.

"All right, let's go. I've warned you; you'll regret this to your dying moment!"

"Which isn't far away . . . you hope," Cloudy mocked. "After you, Colonel!"

They stepped into the crowded outer room. Passing orderlies saluted the three officers and hurried on, intent on their own affairs. A captain hesitated in front of them near the door.

"Will the Colonel be gone long? That conference with General Stevens, you know—"

Cloudy's hidden gun poked warningly into Bragg's side. "I'll be . . . back soon," the Colonel choked.

They reached the door, stepped out on the field. "Straight toward those two ships," Cloudy muttered. They went on, the two subaltern officers a courteous step behind the Colonel. Bragg looked around desperately, glanced at Cloudy's blazing eyes and shrugged in resignation.

They crossed the corner of the field, approached the waiting Spad and Camel. The sergeant mechanic was in the act of dropping down from Cloudy's pit.

"All checked and re-fueled, sir," he reported, glancing curiously at the stony-faced Colonel.

"Good. Sergeant, help the lieutenant here start the motors. Colonel Bragg wants to listen to them!"

The sergeant stared, but moved to obey. First the Camel, then the Spad was started. The motors settled into a rhythmic drone. Cloudy jerked his head significantly at Sheffield and the Englishman swung up to his pit. At that moment Bragg twisted convulsively, cried:

"Help, sergeant! These men are kid—"

He got no farther. Cloudy slammed a bony fist into Bragg's jaw. As the Colonel staggered, the Yank half-lifted, half-shoved him upon the lower wing. The groggy C.O. instinctively grasped for struts and wires. Cloudy sprang for the

pit, at the same moment slamming a shot past the charging sergeant's ears. The next second he was cuffing the throttle full on. Spad and Camel thundered away.

Cloudy shivered. If Bragg was too badly dazed to hang on, it would be murder! He delayed the takeoff as long as possible. A flashing glance showed Bragg with a death clutch on the wires. Cloudy smiled grimly. No danger of shaking the old boy off now! He lifted the Spad as slugs whistled past his ears.

The wings bit the air, lifted. He swung sharply, swerving back over the field. Several ships were being feverishly started, and the drome was covered with running figures. The saturnine Yank's arm signalled to Sheffield; they turned sharply toward the American back areas.

"Insulting a superior, shooting at a non-com, kidnapping a colonel—ten men couldn't live long enough to serve time for what I've done!" Cloudy mumbled.

Once sure that he had thrown off any pursuit from the H.Q. drome, Cloudy swung toward the hidden valley field from which they had started. Sheffield landed first, and was waiting as Cloudy's Spad rolled to a stop. Bragg climbed stiffly from the wing, his face white with fury. As the Colonel started cursing, Sheffield turned on him with a pained frown.

"Tut, tut, old man," he said reprovingly. "Your language, not in the best taste, you know. Really, old sport, can't we all be chummy?"

"Never mind the gabfest," Cloudy cut in curtly. "We've got to get these ships out of sight from the air. Half the Allied planes on the Front will be looking for us by now."

CHAPTER FOUR

Death Springs a Trap

IN an hour's desperate work they succeeded in screening the two ships with brush and leafy branches. Cloudy felt

sure that the impromptu camouflage would guard against discovery from the air. He thought of the third ship that had been with them such a short time ago, and of Cartier's inexplicable death. Again in his mind's eye he pictured the green, leafy expanse of the Valley of Death and wondered desperately what malignant power of evil had doomed the ships flying above it.

At noon Bragg demanded gruffly; "When do we eat? Or do you usually starve your prisoners?"

"You eat when we do," Cloudy grunted, "and Lord only knows when that'll be. We're sticking here until night—then we're paying a visit to von Lunn. And you're going, too, Colonel!"

The placid Sheffield slept through most of the long day, but to the chaffing Cloudy it seemed to drag interminably. Shortly after night fell he aroused the Englishman and prodded the sullen prisoner to the Spad.

"If you think kidnapping me is going to postpone the execution of those five pilots you're mistaken," Bragg jeered. "Whether I'm there or not, they'll be shot at nine tomorrow morning! That's one thing you can depend upon, you scoundrel!"

"Don't worry," Cloudy assured him. "If they die, it'll be because the three of us went West first! Colonel, if you've got a family, I suggest you write a letter to them and leave it here. It'll be found eventually—probably after the worms have started working on you. No, I can't see much chance of our getting out of this alive. Who's going to succeed you in the peerage, Sir Ronald?"

"Haw, that's a good one—! Say, what d'you mean? I'm not dead yet! After all, old man—"

"It won't be long," Cloudy predicted. "All right, let's go. We'll drop in at the extreme end of von Lunn's field, without power. In the dark I don't think the

ships'll be noticed. After that . . . Well, we'll worry about it when we get there!"

They removed the camouflage and succeeded in twisting the cold motors into life. At Cloudy's curt command Bragg stretched out on a wing. As the lanky ace climbed into the pit he flung Bragg a final grisly warning.

"Those wires are kinda loose and worn, so don't flop around out there. If we're jumped by Jerries shall I let 'em drill you with slugs, or just loop and drop you off?"

Once in the air Cloudy's familiarity with this region stood him in good stead. He led the way unerringly toward the Front, swinging to cross it above the Boche drome. Halfway to the trenches four Spads swung suddenly out of the darkness. They swept close to the Camel and Spad, close enough for the flight leader to make out the flattened figure of Bragg on the wing. Cloudy cursed softly.

"I knew it!" he groaned. "Here it comes before we even get started!"

Two of the Spads dove in, opening fire on Sheffield. The remaining two cut along beside Cloudy. Because of the helpless man on the wing, they dared not shoot. Neither could Cloudy bring himself to turn his guns loose on the ships. A short distance away Sheffield was ducking and dodging, vainly trying to shake loose his attackers. Cloudy glanced up, suddenly shoved the Spad's nose skyward. Above them black wings cut across the moon.

Cloudy grinned as he made out the broad wings of two Halberstadt night bombers. The next moment Sheffield caught the idea and followed. Not until they were almost at point-blank range did the flight of Spads and the Hal pilots sight each other. As the ships raced into a twisting jumble of wings and blaring motors, the Spad and Camel edged unobtrusively out of the melee.

"Scrap it out," Cloudy muttered.

"We're leaving right now, fellows!"

Bragg's face was a white blot in the pale light as the ships drove on. It couldn't have been pleasant, Cloudy reflected, to lie there helplessly while bullets drummed inches away.

Abruptly he banked steeply, taking a malicious pleasure in watching the Colonel's frenzied grab for new and better holds on the wires. Then he closed the throttle, and the Hisso's drone died to a throaty sob.

Beside him the Camel drifted up, Bentely also cut to a whisper. Cloudy gestured, received a nod from Sheffield. Together they edged down in a long steep glide. Down, down, with a long row of trees looming beneath them, beyond which stretched the vast expanse of a huge tarmac. As silently as hunting owls the ships came in, the only sound the soft whine of the wind in the wires and braces.

Off to the left, perhaps a half mile from the field, the moon laid down a bright pattern across which dozens of ant-like figures scurried about an enormous dark blot. Cloudy stared, almost forgetting the fact that he was about to make a dead-stick landing. Something was going on there—perhaps something that had a connection with the mystery of twenty dead men and the loss of a squadron's honor. That dark blot was moving!

Then the edge of the field was under them, and they dropped the ships lightly over the border of the trees. For a moment after the wheels slowed and stopped both pilots sat tense, ready to gun the idling motors at the first indication that they had been discovered.

But only silence met their straining ears, and in the distance the great bulk of the hastily erected hangars loomed indistinctly. Cloudy climbed down, and Sheffield and Bragg joined him. Cloudy turned to Bragg.

"We're in von Lunn's back yard now,

and you ought to realize that running out on us won't do you any good. We'll be busy enough without watching you. How about it? Will you string along with us as long as we're in German territory?"

"I haven't any choice," Bragg grunted. "But when we get back—"

"You mean *if*," Cloudy retorted. "Okay, we go up along the edge of the field, toward von Lunn's quarters."

Like three wraiths they crept along the dark border of trees, twice halting to avoid field sentries. The ground sloped sharply away from the tarmac into a long, narrow ravine. It was down here that the work was going on which Cloudy had noted before landing. He debated with himself whether he should approach the activity closer, then decided to wait until after finding von Lunn.

The fact that he had once lived on the field enabled Cloudy to choose the shortest, most hidden approach to the building that served as Squadron H.Q. The place was dark as they flattened against the rear wall.

"It's empty," Cloudy whispered. "Von Lunn's probably superintending whatever's going on in the ravine. If we can look around inside—"

Cautiously he tried the door. It opened without a sound and the three men stepped alertly inside. Cloudy held his Colt ready as he risked a swift flash of light from his pocket torch. The room was empty. Cloudy stepped eagerly toward the littered desk, his eyes fastened on a sheaf of blueprints laying there. Hardly had he touched them before steps sounded outside. Feet thudded on the steps in front of the door as Cloudy jerked his companions toward a closet directly behind the desk. There was barely time for them to huddle inside before the outer door opened and a man entered the office. A match flared, followed by the steady glow of a lamp. The chair creaked as a ponderous body sank into it.

THEN silence, save for the rustle of papers and an occasional bestial chuckle. Cloudy managed to get his eye to the closet door's keyhole, and through the tiny aperture found himself staring at the broad back and bulging fat neck of Count von Lunn. At the same moment the German stiffened in his chair, gazing at something on the floor. Cloudy realized instantly that the German had seen some sign of their entrance, that he was suspicious. Just as the Hun started to lift his gross body from the chair, Cloudy stepped out behind him.

The German whirled with a swiftness astonishing for his bulk. At sight of the steady yawning muzzle of the American's Colt, von Lunn's red face faded to a pasty gray.

"*Vot . . . vot iss das?*" he squeaked.

"We've come to find out what happened to those ships of the 55th Squadron that went down last week," Cloudy stated grimly.

Von Lunn squirmed, and his voice had the ugly, hateful squeal of a cornered rat. "Those ships? *Ach*, they were shot down by me and my men, Yankee. That iss fair, iss itd nodt? In fair fight, *ja*. Only your comrades ran like rabbits—" he broke off at the bleak look on the American's face.

"We want to know *why* they ran," Cloudy jerked. "Better tell us, von Lunn. And I'll take a look at those blueprints, too!"

"*Ach, nein!*" Von Lunn's thick hands reached out, grasped the papers and ripped them into a dozen fragments.

"Why you—" Cloudy stepped forward, the gun in his hand boring into the German's soft back. "I'll give you five seconds to come clean! One! Two! Three! F—"

He broke off at sight of the change in von Lunn's face. Crafty confidence had replaced the fear there; cruel triumph leered from the shoe button eyes. Cloudy

glanced at the open window, his heart leaping as he saw three leveled rifle barrels thrust through.

"Fire!" Von Lunn screamed. "Kill the schwein!"

In that split-second Cloudy could have killed von Lunn. But the German must live until his devilish scheme was exposed. Cloudy chopped viciously at the Hun's bullet head with the gun barrel, at the same instant dropping to his knees and yelling at Sheffield and Bragg. The other two Yanks threw themselves forward just as flame spat from the soldiers' rifles outside the window.

Lead ripped Bragg's cap from his head, tugged at Sheffield's tunic. Cloudy fired twice around von Lunn's sagging body. Outside came a short, piercing scream, and one rifle clattered to the floor. Sheffield, too, was throwing lead at the window as he crawled behind the desk. A voice cursed hoarsely and slugs ripped into the desk past von Lunn.

"Rush 'em!" Cloudy gasped, lunging to his feet. He fired again at the window, but it was empty now. Sheffield and Bragg crowded behind him as he leaped through the doorway. A solitary figure was running across the tarmac, yelling wildly. Other Huns were pounding to meet the surviving ambusher as Cloudy jerked his companions into flight. Behind the H.Q. building was the narrow opening of the ravine which further on became larger. Cloudy led the way down over the rocky bottom, fighting back the insistent fear that they were running into a trap from which there would be no escape.

Down the steep gully floor they pounded. boots clattering loudly on the stones. Behind came the crash of heavy bodies in pursuit. Ripping through clinging briars and underbrush, crawling over deadfalls and boulders, Cloudy stumbled on, the others panting at his heels. Then, so abruptly that they could not stop in

time, they plunged into a circular opening in the ravine, perhaps a hundred yards in diameter.

But there was no underbrush or fallen trees. The place teemed with activity, above which ran a sullen hum that seemed to shake the very ground. Dungareed workmen were busy crawling over something huge and black and menacing. Above the thing a canopy of green branches formed a natural camouflage.

Cloudy had no chance to look further at the thing that shimmered ominously in the moonlight, for shots splattered behind them, and at the same moment soldiers on guard about the great clearing hastily grabbed their weapons.

The lanky fugitive hesitated for only a flash, then, gasping a command to his companions, he whirled to the right and began a desperate scrambling up the steep sides of the ravine. The three of them clawed their way desperately upward as the first slugs began spattering around them. Lead flickered from stone, peppering Cloudy with tiny biting fragments.

At the first moment surprise had shaken the Huns' aim. Now that they had steadied, the three fugitives were far enough up the wall to be partially screened by bushes and rocks. A dozen soldiers began a mad scramble in pursuit.

With his tortured lungs crying for air, Cloudy reached the top of the bank, helped yank his companions after him. A hundred yards away the two ships were where they had left them, waiting with slowly clicking props.

With a choked cry of relief Cloudy swung toward the ships. They'd made it! In another moment— He stopped, amazement freezing him rigid. Bragg and Sheffield plunged to a halt beside him, cursing in despairing astonishment.

For the ships were moving! Still with slowly flailing props, the Spad and Camel were drawing past them. And there was no one in the pits! Cloudy darted in fran-

tic pursuit as the ships picked up speed, just as a dozen Boche infantrymen burst over the crest of the ravine and dashed toward them. The ghost hand at the controls of the two ships seemed to relax now, for the planes slowed and stopped.

Before the three Americans could make a move, they were ringed by bayoneted Mausers. There was nothing to do but obey the harsh command of: "*Handen hoch!*"

An important non-com bustled forward and jerked the automatics from Cloudy and the Englishman. Then he marched them, sawtooth bayonets pricking their backs, across the field toward the H.Q. office.

The *unter-offizier* and four guards followed them into the office. Stretched out in a chair, von Lunn was submitting to treatment by a scared looking M.O. At sight of the three Americans he lunged forward, snarling. From the desk he snatched a heavy riding crop. His arm swung, smashing the crop squarely across Cloudy's face.

The lanky ace growled. He leaped forward, red rage sweeping his brain. Once, twice, three times, his iron fists smashed into the German's fat face. Then hands were dragging him back, fists and gun butts and boots were driving into his body. Cloudy sank down into a sea of oblivion under a torrent of savage blows.

When he awoke it was in pitch darkness. A stiff crust of blood caked his face and upper body; his uniform was in tatters.

"Sheffield! Colonel Bragg!" he whispered hoarsely.

"Here, old fellow," Sheffield answered softly.

"I hope you're satisfied," Bragg growled. Yet there was a note of grudging admiration in his voice as he went on: "You sure absorbed a hell of a going over. Sheffield tried to mix in, and they knocked him cold with a rifle barrel."

"Where are we?" Cloudy mumbled. His body was one vast ache as he moved experimentally. Yet his hands and feet were not tied, nor, obviously were the others', for Sheffield came groping over to him.

"In the bally guardhouse, with a half dozen Jerries outside the door," Sheffield said quietly. "That blighter von Lunn said we've seen too much. If he means that arrangement in the ravine, it didn't make sense to me."

"It's just beginning to, to me," Cloudy grunted. "So we saw too much, did we?"

"Oh, rather! Anyway, the jolly old boy insists on putting us away when dawn comes."

"You mean . . . a firing squad?"

"So I gathered. He seemed quite put out!"

"Well, I expected it," Cloudy muttered. "I wonder how it'll feel, standing up there, waiting for the command to fire! Lead ripping through us—Bragg, being a colonel, they'll probably shoot you last. You can watch us and—"

"You damned ghoul! Will you shut up?" Bragg snarled.

"Any possible chance of breaking out of here?" Cloudy demanded.

Sheffield shook his head. "We've been over every inch of the place before you came to. No chance at all. Well, I suppose this is the time for me to be very British, you know. An Englishman always dies game, and all that sort of silly rot. Still, I don't feel so good."

An hour dragged past. Sheffield's talk became incoherent, and when Cloudy felt the Englishman's head his forehead was hot and feverish. A dry rattle began to clog Sheffield's words. Cloudy forgot his own aching body. He pounded on the door, and when a guard demanded in broken English that he be quiet Cloudy snarled desperately; "If you rats have any decency, you better call your M.O. There's a man dying in here!"

The sentries held a guttural consultation, then one of them left. In a few moments they were back. A flashlight shone through the door, showing the three prisoners well back in the room. Two alert soldiers came in first, plainly expecting trickery. Then came a harassed looking M.O., followed by von Lunn.

"Take a look at the dog, *Herr Dokter*," von Lunn said brutally. "I don't want him dying before daybreak!"

The doctor bent over Sheffield, and in the torchlight Cloudy was shocked by the ghastly face of the Englishman. His skin was a deathly gray, his eyes blank and staring. His choking breath rattled in his throat.

"Carry on . . . Yank." Sheffield gasped. "Remember . . . Cartier . . . and the . . . others."

The M.O. felt of Sheffield's pulse, of his heart. Then he straightened. "This man is dead," he said soberly.

"Rotten luck," von Lunn shrugged. "Two of you guards throw him back of the building until we have a chance to bury the carrion."

Two soldiers lifted Sheffield's stiffening body and carried him out. Von Lunn paused at the door to fling back a triumphant taunt.

"Tomorrow, Yankee pigs, another squadron will suddenly turn cowards. And tomorrow Count von Lunn and his pilots will again fatten their record of victories!"

A strange mist lay over the hard-bitten Cloudy Day's eyes as Sheffield's pallbearers disappeared into the dismal night.

"An English nobleman," he muttered. "But a swell guy."

"He was," Bragg agreed unexpectedly, "a swell guy."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Dead Shall Arise

CLOUDY paced the room like a caged tiger. Before he realized it, dawn was creeping into the east and a dull gray

lightened the gloom of the cell. Cartier gone, Sheffield gone, the boys of the 55th dead or disgraced. In two short hours the 55th's roster would be wiped from the slate, into oblivion. The squadron's name would always be spoken of with scorn, as the men who abandoned their trust, who disobeyed their orders, who ran from the enemy. All because he, Cloudy Day, had failed dismally. Beside what had already happened, his own death seemed unimportant.

Guards rattled the door, it swung open, and they came in for them. Weak from hunger and his unmerciful beating, Cloudy summoned the last of his strength, managed to stand erect. Bragg strode beside him.

"I got you into this," Cloudy said slowly. "I'm sorry, Colonel. On top of everything else—"

"I don't mind as much as I thought I would," Bragg answered. "I'm convinced, Captain, that you acted as you thought was best, even as I did. I guess we can forget that and go out like two soldiers should, can't we?"

"*Kommen sie,*" the corporal of the guard snapped brusquely. "The firing squad is waiting, *mein Herrs!*"

They walked steadily out into the gray dawn, heads erect. On the field several Fokkers were waiting with idling motors for the pilots of the dawn patrol. Cloudy glanced at them longingly, then forced his eyes away. There wasn't a chance—there'd be no more wings in the cold morning sky for him.

The squad marched on ahead of them, until they reached the rim of the ravine. The two Yanks stood there, kidnaper and kidnapped, staring at the rifles of the firing squad. Von Lunn came up to stand beside the officer in charge. He glared at them.

"This will at last complete my ruin of the 55th Squadron," he squeaked. "My men who were sent to Paris to kill you

failed, but I am better satisfied this way. Proceed, Lieutenant!"

Cloudy looked into the yawning rifle muzzles, unable to rid himself of the feeling that this was all a dream. "Ready!" Came the command. Then: "Aim!"

Cloudy steeled his nerves, tried to think of the small town from which he had come. He waited in an agony of suspense—Then, abruptly, he became aware that an incredible thing was happening. The rifles of the firing squad were wavering! They were swinging away from him, pointing toward the ravine. The stolid soldiers in the squad shouted in terror. First one, then by twos and threes they stumbled backwards! Simultaneously there came a lusty yell.

Cloudy reeled. God! That sounded . . . it *was* Sheffield's voice! Sheffield, who was dead! The voice was yelling: "This way!"

Cloudy jerked his paralyzed legs free from stupefaction. He jerked at Bragg, and together they half-fell, half-scrambled, down over the edge of the ravine, under the shelter of the camouflage canopy.

Von Lunn was squealing in insane rage, trying to level his Luger. But the gun wavered, fell from his hand. Cloudy and Bragg went stumbling downward, blindly. There was the bottom of the gully, and suddenly Cloudy almost fell over a limp body. His eyes recognized the field gray uniform of a German soldier, then swung up toward the gargantuan shape that loomed before him.

It was a machine of some kind, a machine that towered level with the top of the ravine. A steel ladder led upward along the shape's huge side, and draped around the end of the ladder was another sodden, motionless guard. Cloudy swarmed up the ladder with Bragg at his heels. Sheffield's voice, calling weakly, "Come on!"

Above the sounds of turmoil from the field was a high-pitched, droning hum.

Then, abruptly, they were at the top, on a small platform. Sheffield sat there in a steel control chair, two wheels under his hands.

"Yes, I'm alive!" he yelled, for once alert and excited. "Never mind how. Listen, this thing is a magnet, an enormous electro magnet!"

"Yeah," Cloudy panted, "I began to figure on that idea last night. Watch out, the Huns are coming over the edge!"

Sheffield spun the wheels, and the mammoth arms of the magnet swung slightly. The guns in the soldiers' hands leveled straight at the magnet, held there by an enormous, invisible force. Over all, the whine of the generators rose to a thin shriek.

"See? They won't shoot if they can help it!" Sheffield cried.

But Cloudy was bellowing in Bragg's stunned ear. "Get it? Know what happened? Von Lunn had this machine hidden under camouflage in the Valley of Death, same as it is here. Our ships came over, the Fokkers came out. This thing can be aimed, and at the low altitudes the Fokkers decoyed our ships to, the current was switched on. See? It held our planes headed in a single direction, made 'em look as if they were running away from the Huns. It didn't have to be far; the Fokkers could shoot 'em down like cold turkeys, not being able to turn! That's what happened to Cartier, to the boys of the 55th! They *couldn't* turn! They weren't yellow!"

"I see," Bragg choked. "I understand . . . now that it's . . . too late! God, if I'd only known!"

Cloudy flashed a glance at his watch. "There's still an hour before nine! Sheffield, let me in there! You take Bragg—he can't fly—get up to the edge of the ravine. There are ships over there; see how they pulled ours away from us last night? By focussing this magnet on them! Okay, I'll get you a ship, and I'll take

care of the Jerries. You fly Bragg back to H. Q., and for God's sake, don't let anything stop you!"

"But you . . . you'll be left alone!" Sheffield gasped. "No, Yank—you wouldn't have a chance!"

"To hell with that!" Cloudy yelled. "You two go! Bragg is the only man who can stop that execution! I'll make out . . . don't spoil everything by arguing!"

"Righto!" Sheffield gripped his shoulder. "You're a right guy, Yank! Top-hole, and all that. Behind you, in that corner, is a Maxim. You know what to do. Come on, Colonel!"

Cloudy crawled across the floor to the heavy Maxim, managed to get it turned. He slipped a belt into the breech just as Bragg and Sheffield slid desperately down the ladder. As the squad of soldiers ran forward the Maxim stuttered into deadly life.

Brrrrppppptt! Brrrrppppptt! Flame lanced into the gray dawn, and the ghost-like figures of the Huns melted like grass before the mower. The two fugitives leaped into the cover of the brush along the slope of the bank, began scrambling upward. Cloudy whirled the control wheels, and the poles of the big magnet swung, aimed toward the idling Fokkers.

The ships shivered, began to roll forward. Slowly at first, then faster and faster. At the last moment Cloudy swung the poles away, let the ships coast. He squatted behind the Maxim again, oblivious to the lead that probed for his body. If he could just cover Sheffield's escape nothing else would matter!

The two Yanks had reached the top now, just as the foremost Fokker rolled slowly to a halt at the very edge of the ravine. Dodging to the cover afforded by the ship, Sheffield flung himself into the pit. Simultaneously Bragg lunged out on the wing as the Englishman gunned the motor and swerved the Fokker madly.

Through a hell of m.g. and rifle fire the stolen ship scudded across the field, rose wildly into the gray sky.

Cloudy watched, his heart clogging his throat, until the stolen ship became a distant, fleeing speck. They had made it! They'd be in time!

FOR the first time he gave thought to his own position. For a second he stared dully at a stream of fresh blood rolling down his arm. Funny, he hadn't noticed that at all. A bullet had drilled his shoulder cleanly, another had ripped through the fleshy part of his thigh.

A sound on the ladder attracted him. He slid over, saw two Huns creeping up the steel lattice-work. Cloudy picked up a heavy wrench from the floor, flung it savagely. It struck the first Hun squarely on top of the head. The impact of the blow made the climber lose his grip. He fell screaming, brushing his partner to death as he went down.

Cloudy gazed wistfully at the second Fokker standing at the ravine's edge. If only—but it was hopeless. The moment he left the protection of the platform he'd be riddled. A sudden rushing roar overhead jerked his head up. Two Fokkers that had taken off in pursuit of Sheffield and Bragg had turned back. Now they came diving down, raining slugs straight into his little fortress!

Cloudy twisted the wheels of the controls in a frantic effort to focus on the swinging Huns. Count von Lunn glared down from one of the pits, his heavy face twisted in berserk rage. In vain Cloudy struggled with his unfamiliar weapon. Von Lunn and his companion knew too well the range of the magnet, and they avoided it. The next time they came in Cloudy knew it would be all over.

The sound of a different motor jerked him again to his feet. The Fokkers were wheeling, but from above them came hurtling a trim stubby-winged ship; a ship

that bore tri-colored cocardes on its wings! A French Nieuport!

Like a diving hawk the little Nieuport struck. A Fokker went reeling, down, smoke pouring from the motor. Flame followed, a bursting scarlet gush of it. The Boche plane came down, a fiery torch in the early morning sky. Von Lunn had whirled to attack, but the Nieuport darted past, came zooming down at Cloudy. Through the holes in the leafy camouflage Cloudy could see without being seen. Something about that reckless pilot stirred a familiar chord in Cloudy's brain. Cartier, by God! Crashed or not, here he was!

The Nieuport came helling down, the pilot's arm waving. Abruptly it flattened, to sweep the staring Boches on the ravine's edges with a hail of nickeled slugs.

Cloudy half slid down the ladder, covered by that maniac above who strafed the ravine like a demon. He must get to that second Fokker!

A bloody, battered apparition, he crawled over the edge and scrambled into the cockpit. A wailing drone sounded overhead, followed by a pair of Spandaus' wicked chatter. Von Lunn leveled as Cloudy weathered that first screaming dive. Riding von Lunn's tail came the Nieuport. Cloudy gunned his Fokker into the air, twisting up in rushing spiral. Over to the left he could see Boches scrambling up the ladder, toward the controls of the magnet.

To fall a victim of von Lunn now—his face twisted harshly at the irony of it. Then there was an abrupt tug at the Fokker, which almost wrenched the stick from his hands. The magnet! They were swinging it on him! He zoomed with a wild rush. Suddenly he became aware that there were no more shots pounding behind him. He flung a glance down and back, stiffened.

Von Lunn's ship was diving, diving straight at the tower and its weird weapon. Instantly Cloudy guessed the answer. Either an unskilled hand was at the con-

trols of the magnet or else the controls had jammed. For von Lunn was going down at ever-increasing speed.

Standing now on his feet, shrieking unheard maledictions, waving frenzied fists to the cold gray sky, Count von Lunn saw death coming at him. There was a final breathless pause, and the Fokker partially leveled. The power had been shut off, von Lunn was going to make it. But no! The breathless speed which the falling ship had built up could not be checked. Squarely into the top of the tower the Fokker crashed with a dull roar.

There was a brief flashing explosion, followed by sudden silence. Cloudy wrenched his gaze away, sent the plane hedge-hopping homeward. At his left wing Cartier held the Nicuport even. A half hour later both ships came in on the field at Wing H. Q.

Sheffield came running up, a broad grin on his face. Behind him was Colonel Charles Bragg.

"Yes," Bragg said quickly in answer to Cloudy's unspoken question. "We were in time—barely. Another ten minutes would have been too late. I hardly need to tell you that what happened here in my office is forgotten. I think there are five friends of yours, Captain, who would like to see you!"

"Just two things, first," Cloudy grunted. He turned to Sheffield, who was staring at Cartier like a man who is seeing ghosts. "Sheffield, I thought you died last night! So did that Jerry M.O. How come?"

"Haw," Sheffield beamed proudly. "I used to serve in India; there's a drug there I think they call 'Benj.' Anyway, if you take a small amount it practically paralyzes the processes of the body. Produces a coma almost identical to death, y'know. Fools even doctors, sometimes. Then, if you're lucky, and tough enough.

the effect wears off after awhile. I had some of the stuff, carried it for months; figured if I started going down in a flamer I'd swallow the whole of it and pass out. I remembered it and decided to try. I didn't tell you for fear you'd over-act. I came to before dawn, crawled down to that magnet, and managed to do in the two blighters on guard. Pretty keen for a Sheffield, eh what?"

"Keen *and* game," Cloudy almost grinned. "Cartier, you crazy Frenchman, why aren't you dead?"

"My yarn is simple," Cartier flashed his teeth in a dazzling smile, and stroked his black mustache. "They turned off the current on me a trifle too soon, or something of the sort. I was down out of sight of the tower, and my head was clicked by a bullet. But I managed to land before I passed out. I got the crate into the air this morning, and guessed what was going on when I saw the uproar down around you."

"Well, the machine is in fragments by this time," Bragg grunted, official once "The first thing I did after staying the execution was to order a bombing flight to blow that ravine to hell. And—er—about this business of socking French cabinet officers and being A.W.O.L. I think when the story comes out I can fix that for you two fellows. Captain Day, how'd you like to command a new 55th, formed around those five men? Ah—that's all gentlemen. I'll be in my office if you feel a kidnapping mood coming on!"

"How about a week, two weeks, in Paris?" Cartier suggested. "*Mon amis*, are you with me?"

"Haw," Sheffield chortled, "That sounds a little bit of all right! A League of Nations meeting. and all that rot!"

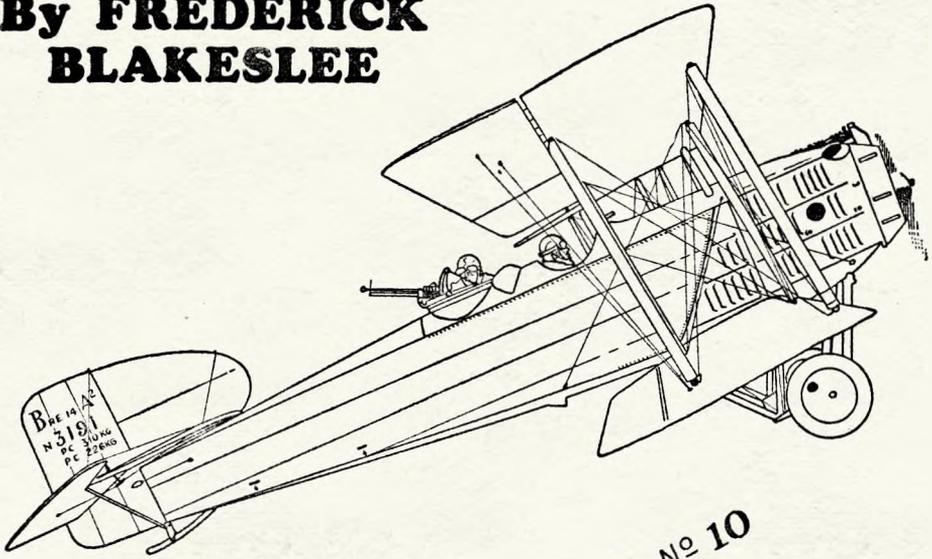
"Yeah," Cloudy mumbled. "After I eat, and if infection hasn't already set in on these wounds."

THE END

ASEMBLIT

PUZZLE NO. 11

By **FREDERICK
BLAKESLEE**



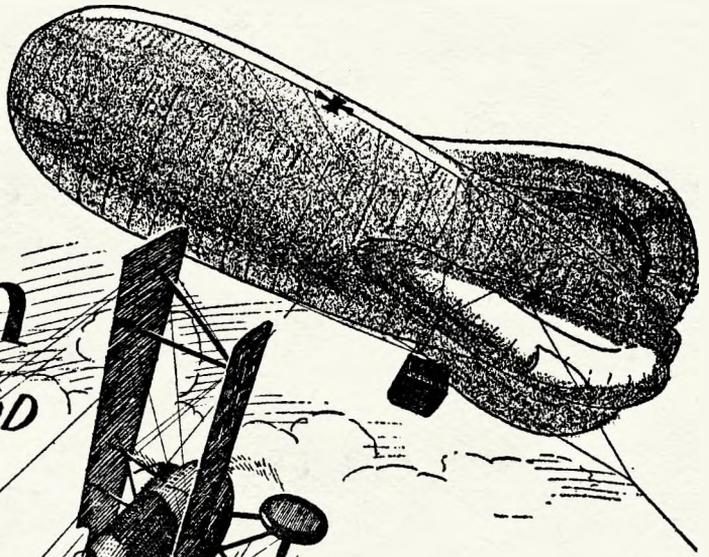
SOLUTION OF "ASEMBLIT" No 10

IF you will kindly turn to pages 96 and 97, you will run into Asemblit No. 11. This is a DeHaviland and shouldn't give you too much trouble, if you follow the simple directions which we have given so many times. Just get out the tracing paper and your pencil and go to work. If you know enough about airplanes, you shouldn't have much trouble picking up the pieces and putting them together. If you don't, well, now is a good time to learn.

Above, you can see what should be the result of last month's puzzle, and I hope most of you guys got it without too much trouble. Next month we'll have to work on a tough one. As you may recall, I promised that every Sixth Asemblit would be a sticker, and since two times six is twelve, I guess the trouble is due next month. It's going to be a modern ship, and you can start your worrying now. See all you guys, then, and the best of luck.

Aces Ride High

by
ELLIOT TODD



Up and under the belly of the sausage the Boche crate followed its nose.

THE Boche balloon, its black, misshapen hulk low on the eastern horizon, fitted perfectly into Bill Gennett's plans. It seemed as though Fate, or the gods of Destiny, had first willed it there, then directed his Spad toward it on a straight, unswerving course from Pool.

But now, as the sausage-like *drachen* swelled in his center section, Gennett felt the old, customary wave of panic flood up from his heart. All his life it had been that way. Always, until now, he had yielded to that paralyzing fear of failure. And each time he had yielded, opportunity had invariably zipped by.

Near the end of his first year at State college, jerked out of a baseball game in the fifth inning, the coach had nailed him on his way to the lockers.

"Gennett, I've been watching you closely for the past couple of months, and I've finally got you doped out. You've got the brains and guts to make a name for yourself, but what you lack is the necessary self confidence to take a gamble, even though you're sure it's the right move.

Bill Gennett was a quiet and pleasant guy without much faith in himself, and he was sure that the laurels of the sky were going to pass him by. He didn't know that the door of hell was about to open wide, and that the steel of men is never forged until they step inside!

With that confidence in yourself you'll go places; without it you'll never make the full grade—either here or anyplace else!"

Such were the thoughts of Gennett as he zoomed his brand new Spad off Pool's field an hour before. But not until the ship had rifled through half the distance to the lines did the solution to that problem strike Gennett with heart-quickenng abruptness.

Here, he faced a new life with a clean slate. Now, if ever, was the time to throttle, definitely and forever, the sinister doubts that had always robbed him of his rightful victories. Now was the time to do what he had always longed to do but somehow never quite dared; grasp a spectacular opportunity, then capitalize on it.

The balloon presented that opportunity.

So with his jaws locked in grim determination, but nevertheless with the old fear stirring in his heart, Gennett ringed the black blob in the center of his ring-sight and poured gun to the Hisso. By God, he'd either report to the 44th with his old timidity completely conquered, or he wouldn't report at all.

Thumb on the trips, he strained his eyes forward, intent on the black shape expanding in his sight ring and on the black puffs of Archie now ringing the *drachen* in a circle of flying shrapnel. In fact, so intent was he on the situation ahead that he failed to notice five sleek-winged Albatrosses hurtled down from nowhere, a bright green ship in the lead. The abrupt hail of lead that crashed through his wings was the first warning Gennett had of sudden death dropping out of the sky.

The balloon forgotten, Gennett's one thought now was saving his own skin. Flight was obviously impossible. With the double advantage of superior altitude and overwhelming odds, he knew the Boches could flay him apart before he could make the lines.

Alert, Gennett watched the Germans zoom like gulls, loop, come rocketing

down with Spandaus blinking crimson. Then, suddenly, a mighty anger began to hammer at his brain. Who were these damned Krauts, to block the only real attempt he had ever made to prove himself? With a blistering curse Gennett horsed back on the stick and bellowed a wild battle cry.

"Come on, you lousey square heads!" he roared. "By God, I'll take you on one at a time or all together—and live to get my licks in yet!"

Blind red rage dropped a crimson curtain before his slitted eyes. Scarcely knowing what he was doing, Gennett hurled the slug-wracked Spad straight up for the lunging Boches, his Vickers chattering crazily. The whole heavens seemed to vibrate with the augmented thunder of Mercedes and Hisso, Spandaus and Vickers. All at once that roaring bedlam was music in his ears, and Gennett knew then that he had found himself at last, that he belonged here in the battle skies, that success and glory could escape him no longer. The thought came so positively that it overwhelmed him with a fierce, new confidence.

Head on for the Germans, he lashed upwards. Expecting the lone Yank to give way, the Boches clung to their course until the last second, then split apart. Gennett pivoted on a wing-tip as the green Albatross flashed by, then lanced down on the nearest Boche with stuttering Vickers. Whooping, he watched a ragged pattern of holes rip up the camel back. Suddenly the Albatross staggered in mid air, flung up one wing and plunged for the green carpet.

First blood for the fledgling!

And for the first time in his life Gennett tasted the exhilarating joy of victory. A yell of triumph escaped his lips, only to end in a choked-off groan as a blast of slugs crashed through his empenage. No need to look. Instinct told him the remaining Albatrosses had paired up and were now plunging down to rake him

with cross fire. He was in a spot.

Snarling, Gennett zoomed, then whipped into a lightning-like reversement. He saw his tracers graze an Albatross' prop disk, only to bore aimlessly into empty space. Before he could correct his fire the Boches wolfed in, their hissing tracers crackling through his wings.

Savagely, Gennett wrenched the Spad in all directions, only to be met at the end of each rush by a withering burst of slugs. Time after time he ringed a shark-like fuselage in his sights, only to see it slip elusively out of range and his tracers cleave through thin air.

Cold sweat began to bead his forehead; his palm grew moist and slippery on the stick. Suddenly a quick stab of suspicion left him chilled with apprehension. Suppose he had been living in a fool's paradise these last few seconds? Suppose he really wasn't so hot as he thought he was; that his victory over the first Boche was a matter of dumb luck, nothing else?

But he cursed away the thought and reached grimly for the trips. However, that momentary weakness was a costly one. Quick to seize their advantage, the Boches tore in with everything they had. A storm of steel crashed through the pit, missing his legs by inches.

Half blinded by his oil-fogged goggles, Gennett turned gamely to meet the Boches for what he knew must be the last time. As he did so, a brownish smear streaked through his blurred line of vision. There was another, suddenly, and four more in quick succession.

All at once Gennett realized the slugs were no longer snarling through the pit. Hope bounding in his heart, he wiped the oil film from his lenses and flung a look over his shoulder.

Six American Spads were going to work on the Boches with cool efficiency. Never before had the sight of Yank comrades seemed so good to Bill Gennett. Already one of the Albatrosses was a flamer. The remaining three were high-

tailoring it for the *Vaterland*, the green ship still in the lead, with the Yanks riding hard on their tails.

For perhaps three hundred yards the mad chase continued, then Gennett saw a purple Very light arc out from the Yank leader's pit. Immediately the Spads spun around in a perfectly executed split ess and came prop clawing up towards the fledgling.

Then the racketing of Vickers guns snapped Gennett's eyes toward his left wing-tip. Fifty yards away the Yank flight leader zoomed to his own level. Gratefully, Gennett waved his thanks, only to receive a curt motion that unmistakably ordered him into U.S. air. Swallowing his pride, Gennett turned obediently towards the southwest, then jerk-around as sudden panic gripped him. But a moment later he sighed with relief as he identified the Yanks as members of the 56th Squadron. At least, he mumbled thankfully, he had been spared the humiliation of being rescued by his own outfit.

SOME fifteen minutes later Gennett ruddered the slug-torn crate down on the 44th's field. Ahead, idling on the line in front of three business-like hangars, stood a solitary Spad carrying the black pennants of a flight leader. As Gennett drew up to the apron, a small group of men emerged from the Operations shack and ran up to meet the slowly rolling ship. Slightly worried by their grim expressions, Gennett untangled his long legs from the control column and slid a bit clumsily to the ground.

Two men led the group around his wing-tip; the first, a tired-looking, grim-faced Air Service Major; the other a hulking, big-lipped pilot dressed in flying togs. Gennett snapped to attention and extended his papers to the senior officer.

"Lieutenant William Gennett, sir, reporting for duty with the 44th!"

Major Hacker ignored the fledgling's outstretched hand. Instead, he sized up

Gennett's battered ship, then eyed the fledgling.

"Lieutenant!" he demanded flatly. "Did you or did you not attempt to attack a balloon over Montrelle within the past thirty minutes?"

Gennett squared his shoulders. Hell, maybe it had been the wrong thing to do, disobeying Pool's standing orders to report directly to an assignment. But regardless of that, he already had one Boche to his credit, didn't he? Let 'em laugh that off!

"That's right, sir," he admitted frankly. "I tried to burn the cow, but five Boches cut me off. I got one—"

Hacker cut him off with a curt gesture, then turned to the big-lipped pilot at his side.

"I guess that's your man, Rickard!"

At the name, Gennett blinked a couple of times and swallowed hard. In his position, what fledgling wouldn't have done just that? Rickard's reputation extended as far back as the training fields—the swaggering, browbeating bully of the 44th. He was flight leader and real boss of the outfit; the ace with thirty-two victories, each one, it was rumored, stained with the blood of a Yank fledgling. Rickard, they said, took orders from nobody, Wing included. Wing had a habit of handling aces of his magnitude with kid gloves.

"You guess? Hell, I *know* it is!"

His face flushed with anger, the big pilot shoved the C.O. roughly aside and stepped forward until his heavy features were only inches from the fledgling's bony jaw.

"Get this, you turkey!" he ripped out. "That balloon has been ordered down by Wing, and for plenty of good reasons! The man who knocks it off gets an advance in rank and a week's leave in Paris! An hour ago I took off to cash in on that offer. I had all the breaks—at first. The sun was at my back, hiding me from von Falkner, who was covering the balloon.

The set-up was as perfect as hell!

"Then *you* barged into the picture! Naturally, von Falkner spotted you and that ruined my chances of getting the bag. Now get this, punk! I consider that balloon and what goes with it my personal property, not to be interfered with. That's a warning from me, Captain Roland Rickard! Do you understand that?"

Unwaveringly, Gennett met that beady stare.

"No, sir," he said simply. "I don't see why that balloon isn't anybody's meat!"

Gennett's pointed answer brought a snicker of laughter from the group of pilots. To a man their attention was fixed on him, and Gennett detected a curious mixture of admiration and anxiety on their tense faces. Rickard's scowl deepened.

"You heard what I said!" he snarled. "And just remember this—if you cross me again I'll push your nose around to the back of your head!"

"Crossed you?" Gennett repeated evenly. "You admit you saw those Albatrosses attack me. Then why didn't you come down and give me a lift? It looks like you did a little crossing yourself—running out on me in the face of those five Boches!"

Crack! Rickard's fist swung up from his waist. It was a sucker shot, pure and simple, and it connected with the fledgling's jaw with pile-driver force. Dazed momentarily, Gennett sank to hands and knees, blood streaming from his split lips.

Major Hacker stepped quickly up to the 44th's ace flight leader, his face drawn and white.

"Cut it, Rickard!" he snapped. "You can't get away with this! I draw the line—"

"Shut up, Hacker!" Rickard shot back. "What are you trying to do, give me orders again? You know damned well I answer only to Wing—and then when I please. Now get the hell out of the way before I throw you out!"

Strength was flowing back into Gen-

nett's spring steel muscles, now. Eyes slitted, he started upwards. But even before his hands left the ground Rickard swung again. Every ounce of Rickard's 200 pounds were back of that treacherous roundhouse and it crashed squarely on the point of Gennett's jaw. A million stars exploded inside the fledgling's skull. Knocked cold, he sank back to the ground, enveloped in the black shroud of unconsciousness.

WHEN Gennett's senses next returned he found himself sprawled face down on a hard, unyielding Army cot crowded into one corner of a regulation Nissen hutment. Still dizzy, he wobbled to his feet, bathed his puffy lips, then threw himself down on the cot.

Systematically, he reviewed what had happened. If he accepted his beating without a protest, simply drifted into the routine of the squadron, Gennett knew his new found and hard won confidence would soon crumble under Rickard's domination. Now was the time to pay back the big-lipped ace in his own brand of money and keep the respect he now had for himself.

But how? The balloon, of course! Obviously, Rickard wanted more than anything else the reward that went with the *drachen's* destruction. If he, as a green fledgling, could beat the flight leader to it, Gennett knew Rickard could never survive the humiliation of that defeat. The 44th wouldn't let him.

Abruptly, Gennett dragged himself to his feet and shoved outside. Both Spads still stood on the line, revving over. A mechanic sat in the pit of his own ship, watching the tachometer needle intently. At Gennett's approach he throttled back, vaulted to the ground and touched his cap respectfully.

"She's all set to go, sir," he said, curious eyes fixed on Gennett's set face. "You taking her up for a test hop?"

Gennett legged into the pit and reached for the throttle.

"My regards to Rickard," he grinned. "I'm going out for that sausage, and I hope he chokes when you tell him!"

The greaseball reached up swiftly and grasped the fledgling's arm.

"Listen, buddy!" he rapped. "Rickard'll tear your heart out for this. You don't know that louse. He'll—"

Under full gun the Spad flashed across the field and hurled itself into the eastern sky. Hunched forward in the pit, Gennett stared grimly through the churning prop. His bridges were burned behind him now, but what the hell! It was better to die like a man than live to lick Rickard's boots like the rest of the 44th.

A few miles ahead, a great bank of low-hanging clouds was rolling down out of the north. Gennett nodded with satisfaction. The breaks were beginning to come his way at last. All he had to do was to fly a compass course over the clouds until he reached Montrelle, then plunge down on the balloon. For a surprise attack, it couldn't be beaten.

Accordingly, Gennett carefully checked the landmarks below and heaved back on the stick. Eyes riveted to clock and compass, he rifled over the thick soup, mentally counting off the miles. At last, estimating by this time that Montrelle should be directly under his trucks, he slammed the stick forward and reached for the loading handles. For six seconds the Spad plunged blindly earthwards, then burst abruptly into the clear—three miles west of Montrelle!

Gennett cursed with disgust as his mind flashed the explanation. Flying a compass course parallel to the lines, he had failed to allow for the stiff cross wind that drifted him westward. For proof that he was actually in U.S. air, he had the olive-drab army ambulance far below, speeding over a winding supply road toward the Front.

Thankful that his mistake had been

made too far away to arouse the balloon crew's suspicions, Gennett hauled back the stick for another try. But even as the ship responded a savage blast of lead whistled past his pit!

Frozen with alarm, Gennett banged stick against the side wall and jerked a look over his shoulder. Fifty yards behind his whirling empenage and slightly overhead sat von Falkner's green Albatross, its Spandaus stabbing flame. Thrown momentarily off his tail by the fledgling's quick reaction, von Falkner lashed by, his exhaust stacks belching black smoke.

Instantly Gennett's spinning brain grasped the only logical explanation for von Falkner's presence in Yank territory. Evidently caught out on the balloon patrol with a balky motor, the Boche ace had cut out for home, only to be deceived by the same cross wind that had drifted Gennett westward.

Fingers locked on the trips, Gennett slammed after von Falkner. For a brief second his tracers crashed through the Boche's tail section, then sliced off through thin air as von Falkner rolled skillfully away. Then a flash of intuition spurred Gennett to cuff stick and rudder—not an instant too soon to escape the triphammer blast of steel that screeched past his pit. Somehow von Falkner was again sitting on his tail, hosing short bursts into the trembling Spad.

Grimly Gennett batted stick and rudder, reversed controls, then jerked stick against his belly. So swiftly was the maneuver done that it seemed like one continuous motion. Von Falkner clung doggedly to his tail through the first two turns, but failed to anticipate the abrupt zoom. Before he could correct his mistake, Gennett looped and came plunging down like a comet. Gray tracers snaked out from his clattering Vickers, slammed directly into von Falkner's laboring Mercedes.

Intermittent streaks of flame shot back

from the Boche's stacks, and a second later the Mercedes ground to a stop. Yelling with triumph, Gennett spun in the ship's length and roared in for the kill. Yet even as his fingers curled on the trips he hesitated. To burn an enemy down on even terms was one thing, but to snuff out a defenseless life was something he could not bring himself to do.

Warily, Gennett signalled von Falkner down towards a small field he had spotted a quarter mile from the Yank supply road. At first von Falkner failed to respond. The Boche sat huddled forward in the pit, both arms clamped to his chest. For a moment Gennett wondered if one of his slugs had found a flesh and bone target. But a second later von Falkner weakly raised his arm in understanding and banked in the direction of the field.

Gennett waited until the Albatross had touched wheels, then slammed the Spad to earth. Out of the pit he started off in a swift run towards the Albatross, a Colt clenched in his fist. Von Falkner's head and shoulders had slumped out of sight beneath the level of the cockpit rim. Certain now that von Falkner had been hit, Gennett sprinted forward the last few feet. As he leaned down to look into the pit, von Falkner's hand snaked up to close around his throat like a steel clamp!

Savagely, Gennett whipped up the Colt. *Bam!* The gun exploded as its muzzle scraped the fuselage, its slug ripping harmlessly through the doped linen. Before Gennett could fire again, von Falkner jerked upright in the pit. A spanner wrench in his free hand descended in a blur of light, crashed sickeningly against the fledgling's skull. Gennett slumped to earth with a muffled groan, engulfed in the black void of oblivion.

CONSCIOUSNESS, returning to Gennett, brought with it first a feeling of vague uneasiness. Dimly, he realized he was again sitting in a ship, but a ship that was totally unlike his own. Then, as his

mind cleared, the truth struck him with breathtaking abruptness. The ship was an Albatross—the uniform he wore was German! Thoroughly alert now, he jolted upright in the pit.

“Good afternoon, *Hauptman* von Falkner!”

Gennett’s eyes swiveled around in the direction of the sound to meet the black muzzle of his own Colt! Following the kahki-clad arm, his eyes next focused on the short, blond man at the pit’s edge, wearing his own uniform! Von Falkner bowed stiffly from the waist, a smile of polite amusement curving his lips.

“You should consider yourself lucky, *mein freund*, for if you had not spared my life a few minutes ago you would now be just another incident in the lives of the next burial squad that happens along! Von Falkner, however, never forgets a favor,” the Boche bowed jerkily again. “The debt is now repaid. It is with some regret that I must leave so gallant an enemy in so embarrassing a position. However, it occurred to me that in the role of an American pilot—”

Von Falkner broke off abruptly at the sound of thudding feet, rapidly approaching. An expression of annoyance crossed his face, then vanished as completely as did his Prussian mannerisms. A second later two Yanks rushed up to the Albatross, their regimental insignia that of the Medical Corps. The taller of the two, a corporal, shot a curious glance at Gennett, then faced von Falkner.

“Jeeze, Lieutenant,” he blurted. “You certainly dusted off the Heinie’s pants up there. We saw the whole scrap from our ambulance. When you landed we stopped and ran over from the road, thinking you might need some help.”

Gennett’s mind snapped into action. These men, then, were the crew of the Yank ambulance he had noticed from the air. If he could convince them of the true situation—

“Listen, men!” he rapped. “This—”

Von Falkner lashed out, gun-whipped Gennett across the cheek. The Yank corporal swallowed hard, trying to conceal the look of disgust on his broad, honest face. Von Falkner smiled disarmingly.

“These damned Boches,” he explained smoothly. “They need a bit of discipline now and then. Very well, men. Remain where you are to guard this prisoner. I’ll arrange for a detail to get him in an hour or so!”

Abruptly von Falkner started off towards the idling Spad. In the pit of the Albatross Gennett struggled frantically to shake off the Yanks.

“Stop him!” he bellowed. “*He’s* the Boche! That’s von Falkner, the German ace! He K.O.’d me, switched ships and uniforms!”

The smaller Yank shoved him roughly back into the pit.

“Sure, you’re not a Boche!” he chuckled with heavy humor. “You just got tired of wearing a Yank uniform so you got fitted out in a Kraut monkey suit. Ain’t that it, Slim?”

The corporal stared uncertainly at Gennett, at his clean cut, dark face and at the German uniform.

“Shut up, Stumpy!” he snapped. “You got me all balled up. This guy’s wearing a Jerry uniform, all right, but he doesn’t look like a Kraut to me. I’d say that other guy—”

Out of the corner of his eye Gennett saw von Falkner sprint forward the last few feet and make a flying leap for the pit. Only seconds remained now before he would be roaring across the field. Suddenly Gennett remembered his identification disk. He jerked up the tight-fitting, gray-green sleeve.

“Look!” he rasped. “Did you ever see one of these!”

The corporal took one look, then stepped backwards, nodding dumbly. Gennett vaulted from the pit, snatched a Colt from the dumbfounded N.C.O. just as

von Falkner's Spad lurched forward.

Bam! The slug whistled across von Falkner's pit, flurrying through the padded cowling. *Bam! Bam!* Twice more Gennett fired, but each slug went wild. Then, with a derisive wave, von Falkner wrenched the Spad out of range. Gennett spun back to the Yanks with a bitter curse.

"Swell work, you dummies!" he grated. "This means von Falkner can slide up alongside any Yank flight and murder two or three pilots before the rest of 'em wise up! He might even pull that on *my* outfit! And he's got to be stopped before he gets that chance!"

A swift examination of the Albatross showed the reason for the motor failure. One of that last burst of Vickers slugs had gouged the copper pipe supplying gas to the carburetor. The tank, however, was still half full, since von Falkner had twisted the shut-off valve to prevent fire.

With the aid of a hack saw and a short length of rubber tubing from the ambulance's tool box, the repairs were soon made. Less than twenty minutes after von Falkner had zoomed off the field Gennett was lifting the Albatross into the leaden sky.

The heavy, low-hanging layer of clouds still hovered over Montrelle, but as far as Gennett could see, the sky was barren of man-made wings. Suddenly a thought struck him, so obviously simple that it brought a wide grin to his lips. Flying an Albatross whose presence near the balloon would naturally go unchallenged, what was there to stop him from easing a quick burst into the bag before starting his search for von Falkner?

With that plan in mind, Gennett cuffed the Albatross up into the swirling, white mist. Seconds later the green ship burst abruptly into the blue, drenched wings flashing in the sun.

It was then that Gennett first heard the muffled thunder of a dozen massed Mercedes. Instead of obeying a first im-

pulse to plunge back into the clouds, he shot a look backward, then groaned with despair.

TWELVE slim-snouted Albatrosses in a perfect V were sliding out of the sun, their Spandaus trained directly on his pit. Then almost before he realized it they had throttled down and reformed so as to place his ship at the apex of the V.

Obviously then, the Boches suspected nothing; to them the pilot of the green Albatross was their leader, von Falkner. At least, Gennett thought grimly, he was safe until they wised up to the difference in their sizes.

As quick as the thought, Gennett cramped himself down in the pit in a desperate attempt to lop a foot off his height and six inches from his broad shoulders. For the next few minutes he flew on toward Montrelle while his mind groped for a plan of escape.

Cold sweat began to bead Gennett's forehead. His outraged muscles, cramped as they were in an unnatural position, starting shooting waves of agony over his body. Remembering the clouds and the protection they offered he glanced down. Just as he did so, a wraith-like shape flashed from one swirling mountain of mist to another, and was gone. A Spad! And as momentary as his glimpse had been, it was long enough for Gennett's startled eyes to identify the ship as Rickard's! The 44th's ace louse, out after another crack at the balloon!

In spite of himself Gennett jolted erect in the pit, straining for another look at the Spad. Too late, he recognized his mistake. Realizing that the broadshouldered pilot of the green Albatross could not be their leader, the Boches elected to shoot first and inquire afterward.

As the first burst yammered through his fuselage, Gennett whipped around with both guns belching slugs. Straight back along the left arm of the V he roared, thumbs locked on the trips. The

first Albatross exploded in a flame streaked billow of smoke. The second slewed off out of control, then nosed into a flat spin. But there were too many of them.

Gennett shook his head grimly. Ten to one; twenty Spandaus to two. Suicide odds. Batting throttle, he rammed the stick forward. Seconds later the green Albatross hurtled into the clouds with the slugs still crackling through its fuselage.

Three minutes later, when instinct told him Montrelle should be under his spinning prop, Gennett drew a long breath and punched the stick. Plunging into the clear, Gennett swept the sky, then bellowed a yell of satisfaction. Five hundred feet under his right wing-tip and perhaps a quarter mile to the east the Boche *drachen* rode placidly at the end of its steel cable.

And even as he looked, two Spads plunged earthwards, down from behind the balloon's black hulk! Instantly he identified them; one Rickard's, the other his own!

"Von Falkner!" he blasted. "And ten to one Rickard thinks the Kraut is me!"

Rocketing down, Gennett framed von Falkner's pit and jabbed trips. As the first slugs crashed through his wings the Boche jerked back a look. Hate and astonishment twisted his face as he recognized Gennett behind his own racketing guns.

Carried past von Falkner by the force of his momentum, Gennett hurtled down to Rickard's level before he could lift the Albatross into a thundering zoom. In that brief instant when both ships were opposite Gennett saw recognition flash across Rickard's face, followed by a menacing snarl.

At the top of the zoom, Gennett rolled out to find nothing but thin air for his target. Suddenly a savage burst slammed across the pit, dissolved the windscreen in a shower of flying glass. Bleeding from a dozen tiny gashes, Gennett jerked a look

sideways. Von Falkner's Spad was roaring into his flank, vickers spurting red and yellow flame.

Gennett zoomed, kicked into a half roll, then shoved the stick forward.

Suddenly he remembered Rickard. Where was the 44th's famous ace? Why wasn't he here to lend a hand?

As the Albatross reeled in a split-arc turn, he found the answer. High overhead was Rickard's Spad, poised over the balloon, now being swiftly reeled to earth. Rickard had taken a run out—left him to hold the bag!

Von Falkner, careless in his belief that the *schwein* Yankee was licked, reacted a split second too late. Tracers ripped out from the Albatross and stabbed through the German's pit. His chest churned to a bloody froth, von Falkner slumped over the controls as the Spad heeled over and spun down to eternity.

"That's your finish, von Falkner!" the fledgling bellowed. "And believe me, bum, it was a pleasure!"

Berserk now, Gennett wrenched back toward the balloon. A second later he saw it in the Archie-pocked sky, still apparently unhurt, but five hundred feet nearer the earth. Then Rickard plunged down and under the sausage, his Vickers blazing. Gennett roared his derision.

"Missed it! Now I'll show you the system, chump!"

Jaws clamped shut, Gennett rocketed down like a green meteor—straight down through the blasting sky until the balloon masked the earth below.

Now!

CLATTERING Spandaus drilled twin rows of tracers into the hydrogen filled bag. For a breathless second nothing happened. Then, as Gennett pulled up in a thundering zoom, a sheet of red flame blossomed up from the black hulk. Collapsing in mid-air, the balloon lurched down, trailing a thick column of black smoke. Gennett bellowed a yell of joy.

"Sorry, Krauts! But you'll never know how much that means to me!"

Once away from the blasting Archie, Gennett straightened out for the lines. Rickard's Spad, he saw a moment later, was a winged dot in the distance, streaking hell bent westward.

But by the time the 44th's field slid into view, Gennett had almost closed the gap. Hitting the drome under full gun, he pulled up to the apron just as Rickard's feet hit the ground. Killing the motor, Gennett vaulted from the pit just as Major Hacker, with a group of pilots at his heels, rushed up to block his path to the Spad. Covered by half a dozen Colts Gennett slid to a stop. The C.O. took one look at the fledgling's Boche uniform, then at Gennett's sweat-streaked face—and his jaw dropped in blank amazement.

"It's Gennett, all right!" he mumbled to himself.

Swiftly Gennett related the events. As to himself.

"You got both von Falkner *and* the balloon?" he cut in incredulously. "Nice work—"

"That's a damned lie, Hacker!"

Rickard, listening on the outskirts of the crowd, now shoved roughly through the gang of flyers. "Von Falkner shot this punk down! I landed and snapped a slug into the Boche just as von Falkner was going to finish him off. I saved his life, then this turkey takes off in Falkner's ship and double crosses me just as I'm about to knock off the cow!"

Gennett stepped up, toe to toe with the big-lipped flyer.

"Listen, sky louse!" he rasped. "You haven't got a leg to stand on. If the 6th Balloons saw that scrap with von Falkner they also saw me burn the sausage, after you tried and missed! I gave you a chance then, and I'm giving you another now before I smack that big mouth of yours down your throat!"

The flicker in Rickard's eyes was Gen-

nett's only warning of the fist lashing up for his chin. But this time the fledgling was ready. Stepping back from the blow, he waited until Rickard's fist had passed his jaw, then threw a right hand through Rickard's guard that landed flush on the big man's mouth. A roar of encouragement went up from the pilots.

Rickard's bloody lips opened to emit a snarl of rage. Lowering his head he charged forward, hamlike fists held low. Gennett side stepped neatly, whirled on the ball of his foot, hooked with his left. It was a perfectly timed blow, delivered with every ounce of his weight and strength, and it crashed against Rickard's thick neck, just under his ear. Rammed off balance, Rickard staggered sideways for a few steps, then pitched face down on the ground, cold as an iced mackerel.

Abruptly, Gennett turned to Hacker.

"O.K., sir," he said evenly, and it was then that Hacker really sensed the change in the fledgling's inner self. "I know what's coming and I'm ready to take the bump. I asked for it when I spoiled Rickard's looks, so I guess that leaves nothing else to do but pack up."

Solemnly, Hacker nodded, at the same time motioning behind his back to silence the excited pilots.

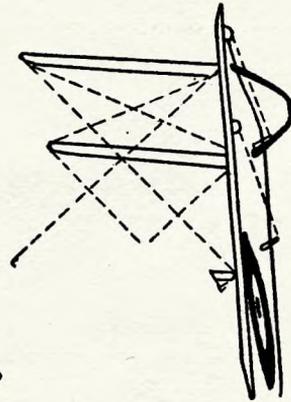
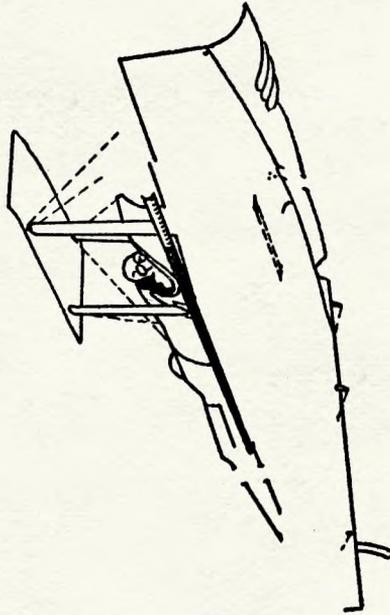
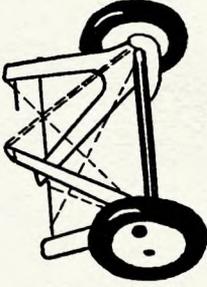
"Maybe you'd better, Gennett," he answered curtly, but there was a ghost of a smile about his thin lips. "It might be healthier. Rickard will be awfully mad when he wakes up, won't he, men?"

The 44th's answer to that was a derisive roar. Chuckling, the C.O. turned back to Gennett.

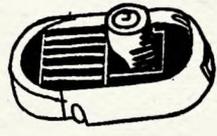
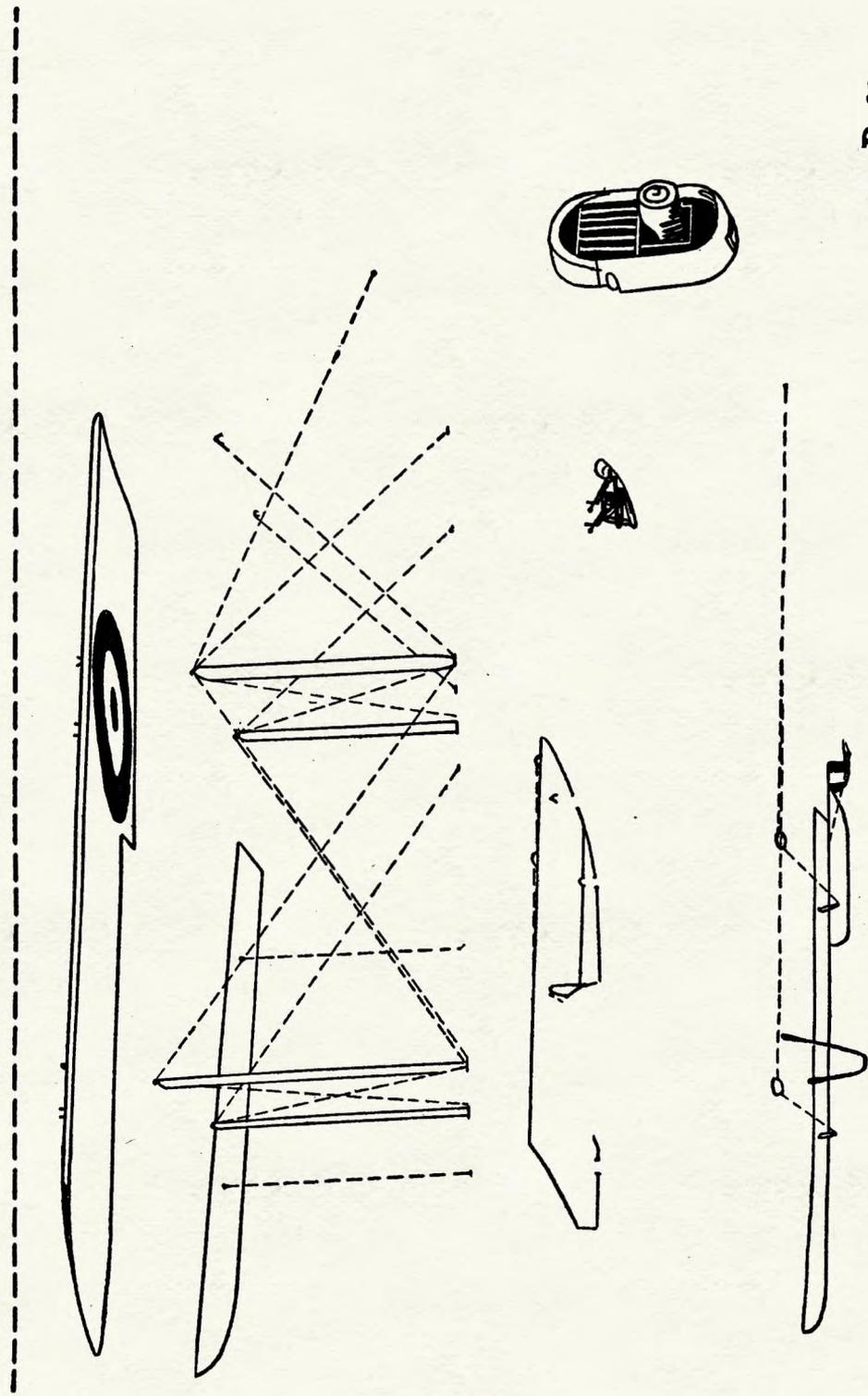
"That gives you an idea of how Rickard rates around here," he grinned. "But," he added after a slight pause, "if you still insist on going I'll write your orders immediately. After all, old timer, it wouldn't look right to have our new flight leader picked up A.W.O.L. in Paris!"

"ASEMBLIT" N° 11

[See page 85]



A-11



B-11



Conducted by Nosedive Ginsburg

ENTER, dear vultures, and sit beside Ginsburg. Ginsburg is a kindly man and shall do you no harm that you do not deserve, and what you bums do not deserve has not yet been written into the criminal records.

It has been a long time since I have talked about myself and it is just possible that you pigeons are not aware of the powers and talents of your commander. In the past I have taken the trouble of telling you that Ginsburg was the greatest catch-as-catch-can-catch-any-damn-thing-he-can-get-ahold-of-parachute-jumper known to man, bird or beast, and I have told you that my repeated challenges to Joe Louis have gone unheeded. Those things you know, and all men know them.

However, when I receive letters that begin with, "Dear Paddle-Puss," or "Hello Gasbag," or more simply, "Listen, bum!"—it is natural for me to suspect that your affection and loyalty are slipping.

You have heard much of Ginsburg the Young, that dashing, devil-may-care hellion of the airways, but how about that mature and mellowed Ginsburg whose literary efforts charm and delight a million followers? People have said that this mature Ginsburg is mellow enough, but that he has mellowed like a cheese. The result, they insist, is strictly camembert, or in other words, I stink. A nice kettle of fish, pigeons, when it should be Ginsburg and the Wright Brothers, Ginsburg

and Lindbergh or Ginsburg and the Angels, great flyers all.

Here, in my own office, I am not without honor. Across the hall where they build the Western Magazines, they have known the sting of my spurs. Naturally, in the Western department they have a lot of cows. for a cowboy story without a cow is like a plane without any wings.

Mixed among the cows that occasionally lumber down the hall, with their long-horns scraping the paint from either side of the passageway, was a certain steer of very bad manners which might be referred to as a Flying Cow. The office was red with the blood of editors who could lasso a standing or sitting cow but who had no experience with a flying cow. Screams attracted my attention, and the sharp Ginsburg eye made swift appraisal of the situation. I punched that cow a few times in the nose and reduced him to a modest sized steak. I bear no scars of the encounter today, but as a trophy for the effort, I wear the ring that was in the cow's nose on my watch chain.

Therefore, across the hall, is great respect for Buck Ginsburg, the flying cow-hand.

All right, pigeons, I'm a liar! But I'm tired and I'm hungry and I have to fill these pages.

Last month, in a moment of confidence, I promised that this issue would contain an article by your old and dear friend, Mr. Dirty Dusty Dowst, and that you

might learn something. I have given up all hope that you squirts will ever really learn anything, and regret to say that Dusty's entry into Aviation's literature must be postponed until the May Issue.

I have received a charming letter from Member Ford Disney of London, Ontario, which goes like this:

Dear Dribble:

I have been reading the punk poetry you run in your columns and the only thing I can say for the poetry is that I'd rather listen to that than listen to you. That is why I have composed a little gem to make the buzzards happy. Here it is, Geeseburg; you can send the five bucks to my address:

DRINK TO GLORY

Up where the clouds go passing by,
And men and ships go out to die—
I think I'd like to drink a toast
To some poor guy's departed ghost.

Some guy who was scarcely more than a kid
When he made his desperate glory bid.
Perhaps for fun, or to serve the flag,
But just a kid who was holding the bag.

It's tough enough in that sky of blue,
When there's just a fragile plane and you.
Sure, medals shine in the gleaming sun,
But so does a hissing Vickers gun.

Heroes live high but they don't live long,
And murder has never erased a wrong.
Planes were meant for pilots to fly,
And not for coffins in which to die!

And so I'll drink to the rambling ghosts
Of those who died at their heavenly posts;
Of them the noblest things are said,
But, alas, poor fools; they all are dead!

Ginsburg can only say that Member Disney is a smart potato, and that the men who died on the Ceiling of the War, have little to show for their brief glimpse of glory. And many of them are dead. Don't let me catch any of you buzzards looking for a War in which to get tough. If you want War, just see Louie the Lush, and we'll hang your hide on the wall.

As for Disney, he shall bear the burden of the Ginsburg Curse for his scandalous remarks concerning your Commander. Nevertheless, the bum wrote the best poetry of the month, and it is my un-

happy duty to award him the first prize of five bucks.

Another windy but talented young punk also lives in Canada. This is Member Hippo Heartz of 181 Kent Street, Charlottetown, P.E.I., Canada. Hippo wrote a mess of poetry and nonsense that stretches a mile and a half when laid end to end over the grave we are building for him. To print the lovely piece would be to move everybody out of the magazine.

Your old friend Hophead Madison is out of the asylum and once again buzzing like a drunken bee beneath your commander's nose. Hophead, that Master of Exaggeration, has forsaken his literary efforts to do a sketch of a few Boeings. Give the bum a buck, Louie, then file him away with those other broken struts.

I have been grossly insulted by Member Dick Lee of 116-38 193rd Street, St. Albans, Long Island, but the Ginsburg habit of returning good for evil shall net the punk a buck.

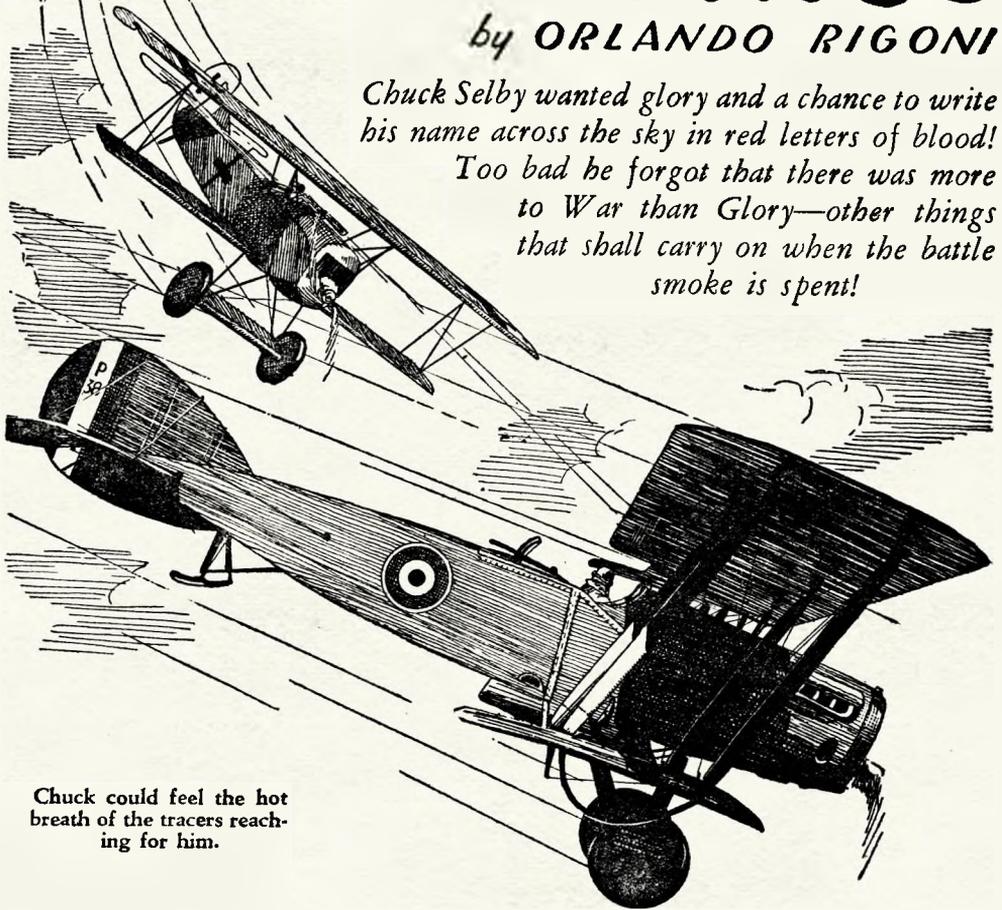
Other bandits with hands in my pockets are Poet Anthony McDermott of Sparkill, New York, and Member Adrian Smith, the Golden Eagle of the Ginsburg Legion. Adrian's letter merits a buck, and the content of his letter should be ample food for next month's meeting. The guy's got something besides fleas, and I'll tell you about it then. So long, you gorillas, see you then. . . Nosedive.

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PAIR O' WINGS

by ORLANDO RIGONI

Chuck Selby wanted glory and a chance to write his name across the sky in red letters of blood! Too bad he forgot that there was more to War than Glory—other things that shall carry on when the battle smoke is spent!



Chuck could feel the hot breath of the tracers reaching for him.

PAIR O' Wings! That's what they had called "Chuck" Selby and Milo Horn at ground school in Florida. The name went with them to combat training quarters at Dreux, and they were still called that when they unloaded their war bags from trucks at the drome of the 45th Pursuit at Charmes.

The peculiar thing about that friendship of theirs was that they were so unlike in personality. Selby was blond, and young, with a full face that made him look younger than he was. There was an eager curiosity in his frank, blue eyes, and he worshipped everything connected with the air force, and said so.

Milo Horn was more reserved. Dark hair, darker eyes, and a skin tanned the

color of old leather. He seldom talked about the war. He went about the business of flying as though it was just an ordinary job that had to be done.

Selby dreamed of the great things he was going to do. He talked of their chances of being sent up with an outfit that had a record—into a sector where there was worthy opposition. Their assignment to the tough outfit of the 45th left nothing to be desired.

As they strode proudly across the dusty field toward the major's shack, Chuck Selby was recounting their good fortune.

"Think of it, Milo—the 45th! Wow! Not bad for a couple of raw bums with the hen dust still in their hair."

Milo grunted in his quiet, reserved way.

"Not bad. But we might not be able to keep up with this rough outfit; they got a record."

Chuck's blue eyes were dreamy, seeing hidden, glorious things. "Hell, man, have we ever failed? I told the folks back home we had a chance for the 45th. I promised to write them as soon as we got our flight assignments. I'm going to get a Croix out of this, Milo," Chuck went on zealously.

Milo put a slim, strong hand to his buddy's arm. "Listen, Chuck, do you mind if I give you some advice."

Chuck's blue eyes stared at his friend questioningly. "Hell, no, kid. Have I ever taken offence?"

"Well, when you report to the major, don't act so eager. He's used to handling men—he can tell without seeing you perform almost just how well you'd fit in with a dogfighting outfit."

"Sure," Chuck flushed. "I guess I did let my enthusiasm run wild, kid. I'll try to hold it in. But this means a lot to me. If I could make you understand how real courage, and glory appeals to me—I—I guess I get a little goofy about that stuff at times."

"I know," Milo said slowly, "it sort of gets a guy here," he put a hand to his throat. "But we might not get on as well as we hope. Remember what we said down in Florida after we'd bunked together only a week?"

"Sure. We said we'd stick together no matter what. We've done it, haven't we? We've had to argue and fight our way along to stay together. Reckon it'll go on like that, Milo," Chuck said firmly.

They were at the major's office and entered the door stiffly, snapping a salute. Somehow, one look at Major Marby's face made the salute seem superfluous. He greeted them with a warm, genial smile.

"Glad to have you men. Those are your ships near the line, I take it—the

ones with the clasped hands painted on the pit?"

Horn nodded his dark head.

Selby said eagerly, "Yes sir. We've flown them for some time now. Finished our training in them. The hands stand for—for friendship, sir."

The major's smile tightened a little. "It's a nice sentiment, men, but I'm afraid you won't find much sentiment in the 45th. It's a tough outfit. You've got to be tough in this war to make a record like theirs. Their rep has drawn some of the greatest of the German flyers to this sector."

"We're not afraid, sir," Selby put in impulsively.

The major's eyes softened. "It's easy to be brave in the face of unknown dangers, Selby."

"We've had fifty hours solo, sir," Selby defended.

"And you'll be flying against men who have lived in a ship for two years or more. You'll fly against Hoeffner, who used to tool Taubs across the line before mounted guns were thought of. You'll meet with Krachen, the butcher, who takes any advantage he can of a man, and Von Hoedy, who has almost equalled the record of the Red Demon himself."

"The bigger the fish, the greater the glory," Selby insisted, his eyes shining at the mention of those famous names.

The major frowned. "I'm not in favor of sending green men out to meet that kind of fish, Selby. In fact, you two are the first rookies we've had in a long time. But I've got to have a man for the noon patrol tomorrow."

Selby's face was hopeful. He wanted that assignment. It would be hard to part from Milo—to fight without his buddy flying with him, but then. . . .

"I want you, Horn, to report to Captain Higgs for duty in the noon flight. You, Selby, report to shed number three for ferry service," the major said shortly.

Chuck Selby stepped back as though struck. At first he didn't believe his ears. "You—you mean me, sir? To ferry hacks . . ."

"Yes, Selby. That'll be all," the major closed the interview.

Selby's eyes misted before he could get out the door. He felt Horn's slim hand gripping his arm.

"I'm sorry, kid. It won't be for long. We'll soon be together again—always together." Horn's voice was husky.

Selby forced a smile. He tried to talk, but his heart was churning around in his breast and choking him. When he forced the words out, they were broken, ragged.

"It—it's all right, Milo," he said brokenly.

Milo laughed, slapped him on the back. "Sure it is, you lug. In a month you'll have enough medals to sink a boat."

Selby was staring straight ahead of him. At the row of hutments he turned off. "I've got to write that—that letter home, Milo. I'll tell them about the break you got. It's great for you, kid."

Selby tried to carry it off, but it was no use. Alone on his bunk, he couldn't write anything. He fought back the tears. Somebody had to ferry crates. There might even be glory in that. He picked up his pencil and started to write.

THAT evening at mess, the Pair O' Wings met the members of the 45th. It wasn't exactly a warm reception. Selby stared vacantly down the long table. He saw the somber, scarred faces of the fighters. He heard Captain Higgs introducing them one at a time!

Smith—skeleton lean, with a horrible scar on his left jaw where a Spandau slug had torn it half away. Greenly—pale and jumpy, with agate eyes that had no depth. The hulking, bull-necked Rider who had a record of fifteen victories behind him. Shaggy-eyed Lund, and the fat Bob Kindler.

Selby acknowledged the introductions with a nod of his head. He felt his lip tremble as Higgs said:

"And this is Milo Horn, men. He's assigned to my flight for the noon patrol."

Somebody mumbled something about wet-nursing green kids, but Higgs silenced them with a frown. Higgs turned back to Horn and Selby.

"This is a tough outfit, fellows. You might as well have me tell you that as learn it for yourselves. When a dogfight starts, it's every man for himself. Nobody is going to help you get your victories, and nobody is going into any heroic dance to pull you out of a hole. I guess that's all."

There was a round of drinks, and Selby almost gagged on the raw cognac. He pushed back from the table before the others had finished eating and went alone to his bunk.

For a week that seemed like a year, Chuck Selby ferried hacks behind the lines. Every day, he went eagerly to scan the bulletin board in the big hangar. And every day his heart seemed to contract with a sickly feeling.

The 45th reported four victories during that week, but they never lost a man. Chuck cursed himself softly, for hoping that they would lose a man, yet how else could he get an assignment to a fighting squadron?

He grew somber—talked little, even to Horn. While the others were drinking and singing in the canteen, Selby brooded on his bunk. Horn tried to snap him out of it.

"There isn't much to this fighting business, kid," Horn insisted. "You go out, you see the enemy. There's one swift minute of hell and the thing's over. I haven't got a victory yet myself."

"But you will," Selby said dully. "I hope you do, Horn."

It was then Selby discovered that enough cognac could make a guy forget

he was a failure. He began to drink like a fish. Horn sidled up to him one day at the bar, where he was standing bleary-eyed, thumbing a half-empty bottle of hell juice.

"That won't help you, kid," Horn said in his quiet way.

Selby turned on him savagely. "How the hell do you know?" he blurted out. "How do you know the cure of a disease you've never had?"

"I want to tell you something," Horn said evenly. His slim, strong hand reached out and yanked the bottle from Chuck's stubby fingers.

Selby resented the interference. A hot blur of red swam past his eyes. It was all right for Horn to talk. Horn had gotten one victory since their last talk. He was on his way up. . . .

"Give me that bottle!" the blond kid's voice was brittle.

Milo Horn smashed the bottle against the bar. The sound of the breaking glass seemed to do something to Chuck Selby. He could almost feel the splintered glass pricking at his very soul. With a wild surge of temper, he crouched low. He braced himself on his thick legs, smashed a blow at Horn's tight face!

There was a crack of bone against flesh. Chuck Selby felt the force of the blow travel up his arm and numb his shoulder. Milo staggered back—back! He stumbled over the brass gaboon and crashed to the floor.

Chuck Selby waited for Horn to rise. But Horn didn't get up. He lay there, still as death. Selby's eyes widened. The hot liquor drained from his blood as his anger died out.

"Milo—Milo!" he said softly, tensely. A sleeping mech in the corner woke up and blinked at him.

Chuck realized what he had done. He dropped to his knees at Milo's side. Lifted the dark head. "God, kid—I'm sorry! Look at me!"

The color was gone from Milo's face. His hair was sticky at the back. The barkeep was leaning over the zinc-topped bar to see what had happened.

"Give me some whiskey," Chuck ordered.

He forced the liquor between Milo Horn's set teeth. Milo's eyes blinked open.

"God, Milo, forgive me," Selby said softly. "I—I guess I was crazy."

There was no malice in Horn's eyes. He shook his head as if to clear it, and said dazedly, "Sure—sure, no hard feelings, kid. I just wanted to tell you we lost a man on the noon patrol today. The nervous guy, Greenly. It's your chance to get back with me—always together."

Selby felt a dizzy feeling of joy spin through his thick body. At last the jinx was broken! He was going to fly with the 45th!

At that moment a shadow bleared the doorway of the canteen. Major Marby strode into the room. His swift, sharp eyes took in the scene.

"What happened here?" he asked sharply.

The mech who had awakened to see the finish of the play, said slowly "Just a little sock-sock sir. The dark guy got the worst of it."

Selby saw the dangerous light in the major's eyes. He hastened to explain "It was all my fault, sir. I—I hit him."

Horn was sitting up. He objected, "I gave him plenty cause, major. I was to blame."

"That's a lie, Horn," Selby said evenly. "I was drunk and I hit you." Selby knew he had to save Horn's place in the noon patrol.

THE major silenced them by slapping the bar with his boney hand. "I'm sorry this happened, Selby. I know you've been wanting to get into the fighting for sometime now. I was going to give you

Greenly's place. But drunkenness and brawling are dangerous things for a rookie to indulge in. I guess you'd better ferry that old Nieuport behind the tool shed, to Soissons. I'm trading it for an Experimental Bristol which you will bring back. That's all. You, Horn, get your head taken care of and stay on the ground tomorrow. It might give you trouble."

Selby kept staring at the door long after the major had disappeared through it. Horn was tugging himself erect by holding to the rim of the bar.

"Tough break, kid," he mumbled. He seemed unable to keep his eyes focused, as though he was still dazed.

"Yes," Selby said shortly and went to his quarters.

The next morning he reported to shed three and got his orders okayed to move the Nieuport. It was a lame ship, but able to fly. Selby nursed it grimly to Soissons, his mind dwelling on the tough break he had just received. It was his own fault. He understood that, but it hurt, none the less.

He turned the ship over to the Q.M. at Soissons and signed for the Bristol. As he climbed into the trim, two-place, one-and-a-half strut, the ackemma told him:

"No use to fill the ammo belts, Lieutenant. We haven't had time to clean the vaseline from the barrels. You can tell Sergeant Storm to tend to that at Charmes."

Selby nodded. He jabbed the throttle and the Rolls-Royce engine blasted into wild life. The Rolls was new and stiff, and Selby let her roar to get the kinks out. Then he waved the chocks away—kicked the trim ship down the line and shot into the air.

Still disappointed at the loss of his chance to fight with the 45th, Selby decided to fly back close to the lines and take a chance on seeing a dogfight. He droned south past Vaubecourt, Com-

mercy, Toul. He turned east around the St. Mihiel Salient.

As he neared Nancy, he tensed. A flight of mixed Spads and Nieuports were patrolling the territory just across the lines. He glanced at his wrist watch. One-thirty! It would be the noon patrol from Charmes! With a gasp, Selby saw a flight of Albatrosses diving out of a cloud directly upon the Yank ships!

A red Albatross lead the attack. That would be Baron Von Hoedy! Selby held his breath. It seemed as though the Yanks would never break—as though they were ignorant of their danger. But Selby didn't know the tough mugs of the 45th.

The Yanks held together until the Spandaus began to spin their web of tracer. Then they broke expertly, all save one. That one floundered, jerked as Spandau slugs stitched through a wing and then lurched free.

Selby breathed easier. The Yanks met the zoom of the Hun ships with spitting Vickers. For one tense minute the scene was one of flashing wings, roaring engines, stuttering guns! Selby saw an Albatross burst into flame and whirl down like a giant spinwheel.

It was Selby's first actual contact with a dogfight. The thing seemed unreal. The ships were like giant birds, gracefully gliding above the earth. The sight of the burning Albatross seemed ghastly, out of place.

Selby saw the Germans lash in to avenge the victory. The chatter of the guns became a deadly, terrible sound, like giant teeth shivering together. He saw another German ship go down with a wing breaking off the hinges.

A hot desire to join the fight filled him. He kept edging closer—closer. Still he couldn't make out the individual pilots. He tried to single out Milo Horn, then remembered that Horn had been excused from flying.

The next thing he saw was the red

Pair O'Wings

ship of Baron Von Hoedy cutting the wobbly Spad out of the mixup. The Spad had been crippled by that first burst, and Hoedy was riding it down!

Selby guessed the outcome before it happened. He cried helplessly at the other ships of the 45th to save the Spad. The tough mugs had business of their own. Selby saw Hoedy's guns jittering. He saw the tracer reach out and touch the Spad gently. The Spad began to slip, slow up.

Selby's thoughts were all with the doomed Yank. Without realizing it, he was flying directly toward the dogfight with empty guns! He saw Hoedy's guns barking again. Saw the Spad start to spin—turn over! Then the ground haze swallowed up Baron Von Hoedy and his victim.

Selby began to curse the smug toughs of the 45th. They could have prevented that killing. . . .

With a shock, Selby saw a flight of Fokkers whipping up to help the Albattross. The 45th began to pull out. The tough mugs knew when to fight and when to run. With his eyes on the Spads, Selby heard a ship screaming down directly over him! A Fokker had sighted him, and meant to crash the new ship!

HE forgot the dogfight. He fed soup to the Rolls. A strange, screaming sound lashed past his head. He saw bits of cloth explode out of the center of the upper wing and whip back in the slipstream. It all seemed so impersonal, but he knew he had to do something. He rolled the Bristol.

At last he was free of the Spandau slugs. The Fokker dived on past, and Selby raced the Bristol toward Charmes. He beat the rest of the 45th to the tarmac, and legged from the ship. Sergeant Storm, the chief mech, eyed him darkly.

"Have an accident, Lieutenant?" he asked sharply, noticing the pierced wing

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covering of the brand new ship. Selby nodded. "Better patch it up. Clean the guns and load 'em. The major will want to give this crate its first workout."

With that he legged toward the huts to see Horn. But Horn wasn't in his bunk. With a small fear growing in his heart, Selby sought out the swamper who cleaned the huts.

"Where's Lieutenant Horn, Arturo?" he asked softly.

The Frenchman shrugged expressively. "He refuse, *monsieur*, to remain in the bed. He fly weeth *le diables!*"

"You—you mean he went out with the noon patrol?"

"Oui, *monsieur*."

With a sinking feeling, Selby headed for the canteen. He remembered that wobbly Spad. Could it have been Horn? Could he have been still dazed with his head wound?

He put the thought away. It couldn't be Milo Horn—he and Horn hadn't even started to fight. They were going to make history—together. Always together! Their promise came back to him. He was afraid to watch the 45th come in. When he finally went to the canteen, the tough nugs were lined at the bar.

Selby stood in the doorway, his blue eyes searching the line. His heart tightened. He was afraid to ask the question, but the words spat out unbidden:

"Where's Lieutenant Horn?" he asked no one in particular.

The men swung to face him, caught by the tone of his voice. Smith, his half-gone, skeleton-jaw working mechanically, said in his hollow voice, "Gone blooey. Step up an' drink a toast to him."

Selby felt the words strike at his brain like stones. "Dead?" The word was superfluous.

Captain Hibbs, his big face grim, said, "He flew kind of crazy like. Seemed he was uncertain of himself. I caught a

Pair O'Wings

glimpse of Hoedy riding him down, and when Hoedy rides 'em they stay rode!"

Selby felt a wild fury whip through him. "Hoedy didn't kill him, captain," he said with suppressed rage, "it was you—the rest of this heartless outfit! You could have saved him. I saw the fight and none of you would tackle Hoedy. You're not tough like you brag you are—you're gutless, all of you!"

Shaggy-eyed Lund was nearest to Selby, and at Selby's wild words, he leaped out and struck. Selby pulled up his shoulder and deflected the blow. He struck out viciously at Lund and staggered him with a blow in the chest.

Higgs and Rider leaped forward, caught Selby with their hands and tried to stop him. Selby fought his way free.

"Let me go—let me go!" he raged. "I'm going back—back up there and get Horn. He might not be dead—he might be lying out there wounded!"

Higgs snarled, "Don't be a fool, Selby. When Hoedy gets 'em, their number is up!"

Selby squirmed free. He turned and dived through the door. For a moment the men in the canteen were stunned. They didn't look so tough right then. There was pity in their eyes—honest admiration at the kid's loyalty and courage. Before the tough eggs could get their wits about them, Selby had reached the line.

The new Bristol two-place had been patched and groomed. The guns had just been loaded. A mech was standing on the stirrup, leaning over to shut off the idling Rolls. Selby reached out his thick hand and yanked the mech away from the switch. He leaped into the pit. He still had his flying togs on. Jabbing the throttle up the brass, he whipped the Bristol off the chocks. With a growl of wild thunder the Rolls jerked the Bristol off the line.

Selby saw nothing but the dust cloud

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Dare-Devil Aces

streaming past him. He was out to keep a promise to a buddy. The Bristol batted into the air like a frightened animal.

Selby forced the mighty engine. The surge of power seemed to do things to him. Maybe he was a fool. Maybe he couldn't find Horn. But unless he tried, the realization that he had let his buddy down would gnaw like a worm at his conscience. After all, he had contributed to Horn's defeat. That blow on the head. . .

Selby saw Toule, raped and ruined like a white skeleton. He went on for three kilometers. Then he saw the wooded area—the bend in the river. That was the place. He could visualize the very course Horn's spinning Spad had followed into the ground haze.

There were no planes in the air, for the Germans were down from the noon patrol. Selby believed he had an hour or two in which to make his desperate search. He reached the spot where Von Hoedy had jumped Horn. Then he went down—down—down!

The ground haze was like a veil shutting off the earth. Selby fought the Bristol through the soup. He broke clear two hundred feet from the ground! A shambles of broken trees was below him. He spied the drab fragment of wing covering that hung from a broken limb. There was a narrow clearing in the trees. Desperately he slammed the Bristol into the wind—eased it past the jutting treetops and settled on the rough ground.

Instinct and chance had brought him to the right place. A hundred yards from where the Bristol stopped rolling, he saw the remains of the Spad where it had fallen after crashing through the trees.

SELBY ran to the wreckage. An icy hand gripped his heart as he stared into the pit. Horn was there, wedged under the panel at a grotesque angle. Selby was afraid to touch him.

"Milo," he half whispered. If there was

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Pair O'Wings

any life in Horn, it was impossible to detect it without a thorough examination. There was a ragged wound in his left shoulder, and his forehead was streaked with blood where it had hit the panel in the crash.

Selby was afraid to know the truth. He had to hurry before the Boche should discover him, rescuing a dead man. He lifted Horn from the pit gently. Carried him to the Bristol and propped him in the rear pit. Then he fastened the safety belt and legged into the forward pit.

How he got the plane clear in that small place, Selby didn't know. But he did get clear and circled up to take what was left of his buddy back to Charmes. He hoisted the Bristol through the ground haze, and then the roar of motors drummed in his ears.

Selby looked up. It wasn't going to be so simple after all. The Germans had evidently heard him make that lauding. They were waiting for him. Five gray Albatrosses and one red one! Baron Hoedy!

Selby wasn't afraid. It was he and Horn, together, against the six ships. He knew Horn's body would handicap him, but he preferred to believe otherwise. He meant to make a break for Charmes instead of taking the suicide chance of fighting the Boche. He wanted to kill Hoedy, sure enough, but that would have to wait.

However, Selby found himself cut off by the Albatrosses. The gray ships screamed about him like a fence. Spandau tracer began to reach gray fingers for the Bristol. Selby fishtailed, dodged, rolled out of one death spot, into another.

Breaking from a half loop into a left spin, Selby found himself upon Hoedy's

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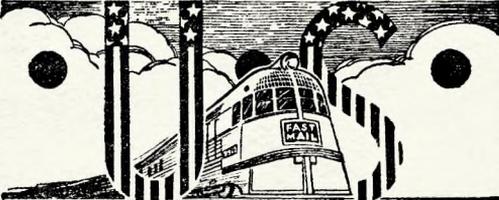


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Dare-Devil Aces

tail! At that moment he forgot everything else. He hunched down grimly. Fed soup to the Rolls! He knew the rest of the Huns would try and stop the killing. He knew that already one of them was whipping in upon his own tail, but he didn't care. If he could get Hoedy, then he was ready to die—ready to join Horn and keep his promise. . . .

Spandau slugs screamed and battered into his plane. He felt the Bristol buck and flinch as the hot lead knifed through it. He didn't turn aside—didn't try and dodge from the death spot. He had the tail of the red ship in his rings. He had to get closer—closer until the gray back of Von Hoedy should center upon the cross-wires!

Selby felt the first blast of the ship on his tail batter into the empenage. He dared not look behind. He dared not think. He knew the Spandau slugs were crawling forward along the turtle-back of the fuselage, but he had to take that chance. . . .

Suddenly, he caught red in the outer ring. He kicked the Bristol left just a little. The red swam across the wires! Then he hammered down on the trips. His first blast missed—he screwed down. He felt the Spandau slugs behind him pounding closer—closer! He knew the next moment might be his last.

Again he snapped the trips. This time Von Hoedy jerked as though stung by a giant wasp. He turned his fox face back, and the sharp features were blotted out by a wall of hot lead!

It was then Selby braced himself for the end. He could never escape. . . .

The thought died suddenly. The sound of Lewis guns snarled at his back. Gaping, wide-eyed he stared into the rear pit. Milo Horn was working the guns! It didn't make sense, but it was true. He hadn't been killed after all. He had been sorely wounded; he had been stunned, unconscious, but the cold upper air had revived him—the roar and rattle of the

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Pair O'Wings

fight had warned him. With his good hand he was swinging the Lewis gun in a short arch cutting down the ship on Selby's tail!

With an overpowering surge of joy, Selby tried to avoid the lashing Albacrosses that were grimly intent upon revenging the death of their leader. There were still four against one—four swift pursuit ships against one two-seater.

The sky, at that instant, rained help in the form of the battered Spads of the 45th. Captain Higgs was leading them. The tough mugs, who had bragged that it was every man for himself, had come out to save the blond kid who had gone out to rescue a dead man.

The 45th made short work of the Boche ships. Selby headed the Bristol home with the Spads forming an escort of honor on either side of him. He looked back at Milo Horn. Horn was slumped weakly in the seat, but he grinned gamely.

Selby jerked a look across at the tough mugs. They didn't look so tough right then. Captain Higgs was smiling, a strange, friendly smile. The bull-necked Rider was fisting eyes moist with tears.

So it was that the Pair O' Wings flew back to Charmes and began their march toward glory—together!

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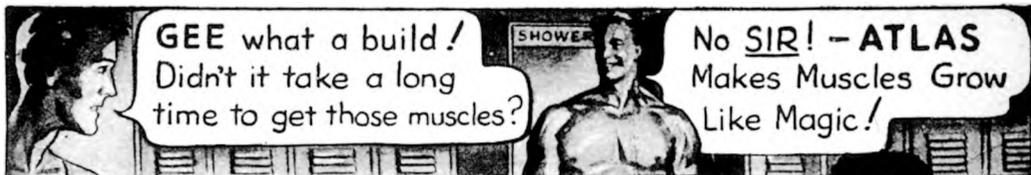
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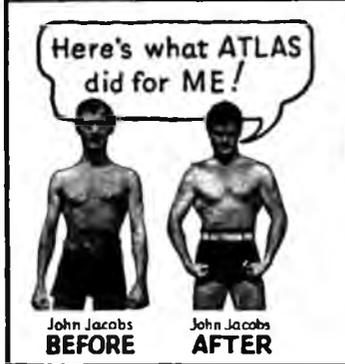


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