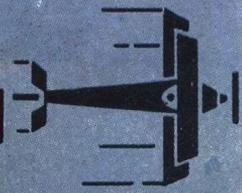


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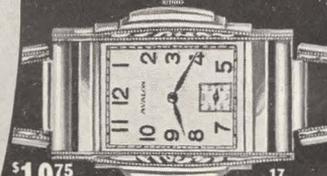
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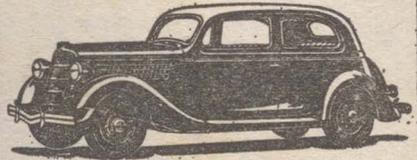


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Vol. 18

Contents for December, 1937

No. 1

Roaring Sky Novel

- WINGS OF THE CONDEMNED**.....*Darrell Jordan* 8
The air was full of mystery and of bullets as Monk Drummond and Blacky Nevers fought a private war of their own. Half of the answer to a damned important problem was tattooed on Drummond's shoulder—but the other half was still to be written—in blood!

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McNamara and Molloy were smart—so smart that they could count all the way up to the eight ball!
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January Issue Out Nov. 25th

All stories new; no reprints.

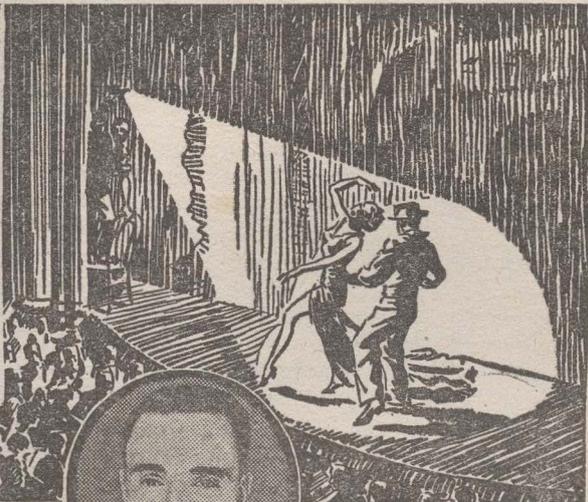


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Panic Loomed...The Show Went On!



Crowded Theatre Goes Dark as Fuse Blows

"The dog-and-pony number was finishing," writes Stage Manager Frank M. Polhamius, Jr., of 195 Fuller Lane, Winnetka, Ill., "when an overloaded main fuse blew out. As the stage went black, panic threatened the lives of thousands crowding the full house.

"Part of my equipment as stage manager is my trusty 'Eveready' flashlight. Before the audience could sense that anything was wrong, I called for the curtain, dashed to the wings and played my flashlight on the apron of the stage like a baby spot.

"Fortunately, a dance team was ready to go on. In a split second they were on the stage and going through their routine in the spot furnished by my flashlight. DATED 'Eveready' batteries in that



flashlight had lighted my way around dark theatres for many weeks before they

were called upon to meet this spine-chilling emergency. So you can bet I realized in those critical moments just how much it can mean to buy batteries that are *fresh* and full of life. No one can ever know how many lives were saved by DATED 'Eveready' batteries that night.

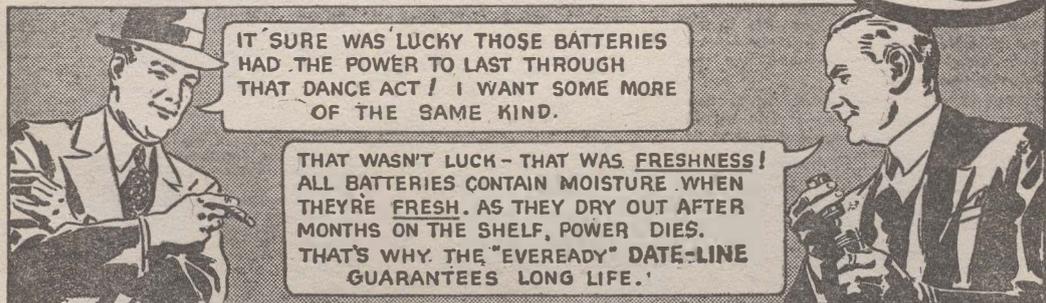
(Signed)
Frank M. Polhamius, Jr.



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WINGS OVER NEW YORK

AS THIS is being written, the sky over New York is black with planes—war planes. Great Boeing four-motored bombers drone above the city in perfect formation, their thunderous song of power filling the air.

After them swoop trim, lightning-like pursuit ships—clouds of them. The eyes of the pilots are glued to the ring-sights and their hands are tight on the sticks.

Below the planes is an army of half a million blue-clad men. An army that has completely taken over the city in the past forty-eight hours and which fills the streets and taxes the transportation facilities of the city to the utmost.

But it isn't war. This is a peaceful army, returned to the scene of its embarkation for France and the real battle-lines, twenty years ago. Those planes above the skyscrapers are not destruction bent. They are there in tribute to and for the edification of that army which crowds the boulevards and the side-streets. The American Legion is in town.

The hotels are jammed with a holiday crowd that goes its way to the sound of roaring laughter. Traffic is at a standstill, and all efforts to control it have been abandoned. Cannons boom in the streets, and here and there men stagger and are held erect only by the efforts of their comrades. But the guns are toys, and the unsteady gents are Legionaires who have celebrated not wisely but too well.

So the vast invading army and the roaring planes are not to be feared. They come on a peaceful mission, but it could easily be otherwise. All the colorful display, the tramping feet, the screaming engines, the flat, ominous report of guns, might well be the setting for an entirely different form of drama—a form which is being enacted in several parts of the world at the present moment.

How easily those soaring planes might unload great bombs, instead of the paper pamphlets which they are now scattering. How simple to picture the invading hundreds of thousands with bayoneted rifles

How do you know you can't write?

HAVE you ever tried? Have you ever attempted even the least bit of training, under competent guidance?

Or have you been sitting back, as it is so easy to do, waiting for the day to come some time when you will awaken, all of a sudden, to the discovery, "I am a writer"?

If the latter course is the one of your choosing, you probably *never will write*. Lawyers must be law clerks. Engineers must be draftsmen. We all know that, in our times, the egg does come before the chicken.

It is seldom that any one becomes a writer until he (or she) has been writing for some time. That is why so many authors and writers spring up out of the newspaper business. The day-to-day necessity of writing—of gathering material about which to write—develops their talent, their insight, their background and their confidence as nothing else could.

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Many people who *should* be writing become awestruck by fabulous stories about millionaire authors and therefore give little thought to the \$25, \$50 and \$100 or more that can often be earned for material that takes little time to write—stories, articles on business, fads, travels, sports, recipes, etc.—things that can easily be turned out in leisure hours and often on the impulse of the moment.

A chance to test yourself

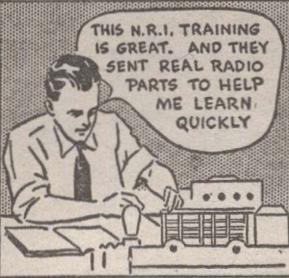
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THANKS

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TOM SAID "NO" HE'S STILL WAITING FOR "LUCK"



BILL'S A SAP TO WASTE HIS TIME STUDYING RADIO AT HOME



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on their shoulders, instead of the harmless canes which they now carry.

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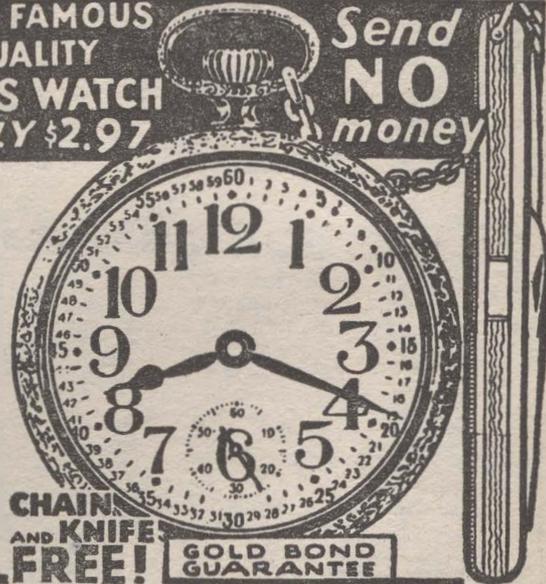
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WINGS OF THE

by

DARRELL



Nevers' clubbed hands came down on the Hun's head.

CHAPTER ONE

Terror Stalks the Drome

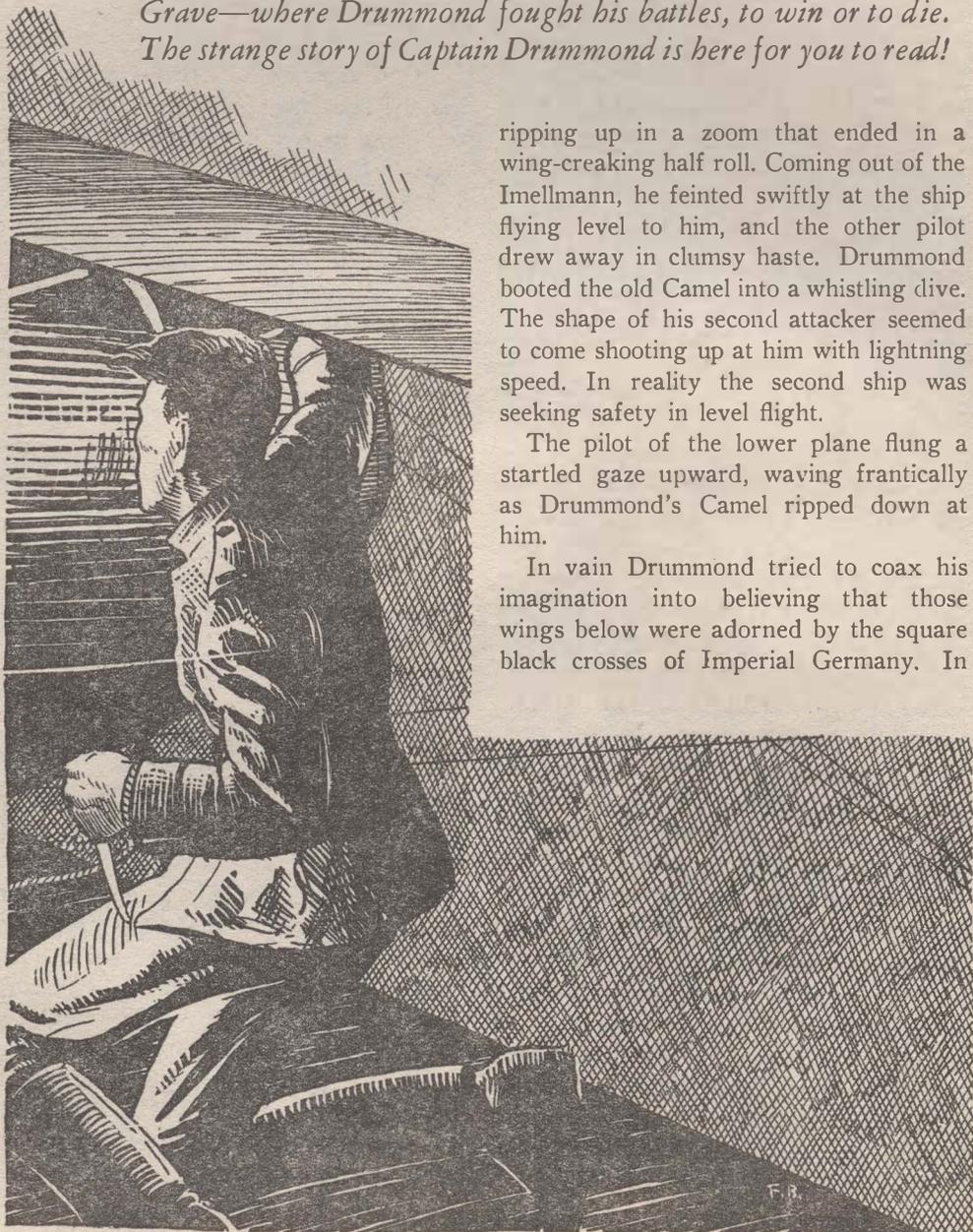
BENEATH the broad wings of Captain Monk Drummond's out-dated scout, a huge airdrome presented a scene of bustling activity. Uniformed men hurried to and fro, greasy mechanics toiled over a line of ships waiting with idling motors before the hangars. In the sky about him a dozen ships rolled, zoomed and dove in the late afternoon sunlight.

Drummond gave no heed to any of this; his entire attention was fixed on the two planes which were roaring behind and above him, clumsily seeking a position on his tail. Drummond's gray eyes were narrowed morosely, his normally good-humored face wore a bitter scowl. With a gesture of disgust he sent his aged crate

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Monk Drummond fought hard for his personal honor, on the ground and in the sky! Up where the guns speak out their words of sudden Death, where wings fold in flame and salute the yawning lips of the Grave—where Drummond fought his battles, to win or to die. The strange story of Captain Drummond is here for you to read!



ripping up in a zoom that ended in a wing-creaking half roll. Coming out of the Imellmann, he fainted swiftly at the ship flying level to him, and the other pilot drew away in clumsy haste. Drummond booted the old Camel into a whistling dive. The shape of his second attacker seemed to come shooting up at him with lightning speed. In reality the second ship was seeking safety in level flight.

The pilot of the lower plane flung a startled gaze upward, waving frantically as Drummond's Camel ripped down at him.

In vain Drummond tried to coax his imagination into believing that those wings below were adorned by the square black crosses of Imperial Germany. In

vain his blunt fingers slid along the stick searching for the Vickers' triggers. Abruptly the illusion faded. Drummond horsed the Camel from its dive mechanically and waved an arm in signal to the other two pilots. For there were no triggers on that control stick—there weren't even any Vickers. Nor were there Maltese crosses on the ships he had been engaging. Therein lay the cause for the big Yank's moody bitterness. The field below was an advanced training school, and he, the great Monk Drummond, had just finished giving a pair of embryo aces a first lesson in combat flying.

Drummond sent the training ship gliding toward the broad drome below, allowing the two student flyers to land first. Rolling up to the line, Drummond ruddered the old Camel in a half circle and cut the switch. He climbed down to the ground, stood lighting a smoke. A square block of a man was Drummond, built on massive lines. Everything about his seemed angular; square shoulders, thick square fingers and hands, and a rough-hewn face that appeared to have been chipped from solid granite. Yet there was a delicate artistry in those big hands that could put a fighting ship through its paces like an accomplished musician evoking the utmost from his instrument.

The students edged forward, eying him apprehensively. They had a great deal of respect for their famous instructor, a respect that was tinged with fear of his caustic tongue and physical strength.

"How . . . how'd we do?" one youngster asked timidly.

Drummond swung on him with explosive contempt. "You were rotten, both of you! You looked like a couple of girls taking their first dancing lesson! God! A Hun could take on ten like you, and shoot you to ribbons in five minutes! You forgot everything I'd told you—"

He broke off abruptly, throwing the half finished cigarette to the ground. His

great hand smote the red-faced kid's shoulder. "Oh, hell, forget it, son. I guess you do as well as I did the first time. It's not your fault, kid. It's this lousy job. I wasn't meant to be an instructor, anyway!"

Drummond stamped off to his quarters, a haunted expression in his squinted gray eyes. A moment later he sat on his bunk, dragging moodily at a half-filled bottle. Directly contrary to orders, of course, but the hell with that! Two weeks he'd been here now, acting as chief instructor in combat flying. And it was all Major Barringer's doings; he realized that well enough. Jealousy had prompted the 33rd's C.O. in arranging this, and no one could tell Drummond different. With Drummond out of the way, Barringer was the sector's ranking ace. All that stuff in the C.O.'s recommendation about Drummond's having done his share, about a great ace being more useful behind the lines—propwash! It was jealousy, nothing more, that lay behind his transfer.

Many another front line pilot would have jumped at the chance of finishing his service in the comparatively safe role of instructor, but with big Drummond it was different. Too long had the giant lived the swift, reckless life of continual danger to be content with anything else. He was only twenty-one, but few men had crammed as much living into that span of time. Drummond lost himself in a dreary nostalgia.

A swift, high pitched drone swelled out of the east, a sound that grew rapidly to a deep, rhythmic thunder. It was a sound that jerked Drummond out of his thoughts in a hurry. No decrepit Camel or R. E. training ship, this. He recognized that motor instantly. That was a late model, perfectly tuned Hispano! Drummond lunged to his feet and pounded out on the field.

A swift-winged shape flashed overhead, banked neatly around into the wind and

came gliding smoothly in for the landing. The Spad slowed, rolled to a stop. The prop flailed to a halt as the pilot, slender, rawboned, leathery-faced, clambered nimbly to the ground.

"Blacky Nevers!" Drummond roared, dashing toward him. He flung one huge arm around the newcomer's shoulders and Nevers winced under the power of that bearhug.

Drummond dragged his grinning friend toward the pine-boarded room that served him as quarters. "Come on in, you grinning idiot! Have a drink! What're you doing here, anyway?"

Nevers cradled the glass in one hand, lighted a cigarette with the other. The hand shook, and beneath the almost Indian-like mask of Nevers's face Drummond sensed tense uneasiness.

"As a matter of fact, Monk, I sneaked down here," the lanky man stated. "How're you making it, fella?"

Drummond's fist smote the table a shattering blow. "I'm rotting away here, Blacky! This is no spot for a man like me! Sometime I'm gonna get these two hands around Barringer's neck—"

Nevers nodded. "You could do with a little action, then?"

"Action?" Drummond leaned forward eagerly. "What you driving at, Blacky? Damn you, if you just came down here to gloat—"

Nevers swallowed the rest of his drink. "Listen, Monk, maybe I'm getting jittery with old age, or something—anyway, here's the dope. Last night a Boche ship landed, or rather, crashed on our field. It was all shot to hell, and so was the pilot. He was only a young kid, and I got to him first, dragged him out of the mess. He died there in my arms, before anybody else arrived. Before he went West he talked, Monk!"

"Well, go on!"

Nevers leaned closer. "It was all damned incoherent, but this is the way I

pieced it together. This German kid overheard his commander discussing some scheme that the officer didn't want known by anyone but his second-in-command. The kid talked out of turn, protested against the plan, or something of the sort. Anyway, the staffel leader, his lieutenant, and the kid went on a patrol. The big shot turned his guns on the kid, shot him to ribbons. Crazy for revenge, the kid told me all this. He said our outfit and the 36th was gonna be wiped out. The funny part is, *your* name was mentioned! This Hun commander is gunning for you, or something of the sort!"

"You reported it?"

"Yeah. Barringer wouldn't even make an official report of it—claimed it was a lot of nonsense. But the thing got me. That kid wasn't lying! I've a hunch that something damned unpleasant is heading for the 33rd and 36th! You're involved in some way, and you've always had a knack at getting to the bottom of things. Can you get away from here for a few days? I thought we could do a little nosing around. Barringer doesn't know I'm here; he'd raise the devil if he did."

"Who is this Hun C.O. you spoke about?" Drummond demanded.

"A guy named Frederich von Kransborg. Know him?"

DRUMMOND lunged to his feet. "Know him? I'll say I do, and so do you! That guy is the brainiest, cleverest, cold-blooded butcher in the Imperial Air Service! And boy, I'm telling you he's no bluff. You're damned right something's brewing, if von Kranborg's behind it! You know, Blacky, I've run across his name in one of my father's old diaries. I don't know the connection, but—"

"Your dad never told you?"

"My father died when I was five," Drummond said slowly. "He was a scientist, you know, and a good one. I never

found out just what happened to him."

He paused for a moment, then rose. "By Heavens, I just remembered! The lawyer who wound up dad's estate told me that there was a letter he'd left to me, but that I wasn't to have it until I was twenty-one! My birthday was last week, but my mail hasn't been forwarded here yet. I wonder if that letter's shown up yet?"

"There was a bunch of mail for you at the squadron," Nevers admitted, "but I forgot to bring it along. How about that leave, Monk?"

"I'll get it," Drummond promised grimly, "or know why not! Come on, we'll see Colonel Leggett!"

Five minutes later both men stood before Colonel Leggett's desk. The school commander, a pompous non-flying political appointee, listened impatiently to Drummond's request for a week's relief from duty.

"You say something has come up back at your old squadron that needs your attention?" the Colonel repeated. "Then why hasn't the squadron C.O. requested your transfer back? I can't recommend leave on any such flimsy excuse as that! You're needed here; by your shining example, your—"

"I've heard all that bal—argument before," Drummond interrupted angrily. "The point is, I've got to have some time off!"

"Request refused!" Leggett said importantly.

"That's final?" Drummond's voice held a menacing rumble.

"Absolutely, Captain. As long as I am in command here—"

Drummond didn't wait to listen. He stamped from the room and headed toward the hangars.

"Well, that's that," Nevers grumbled.

"I'm taking a vacation!" Drummond retorted grimly. He motioned a field sergeant over. "That Camel gassed up?"

At the non-com's nod, Drummond crammed his big body down in the pit. A greaseball spun the prop and the old Bentley roared into life at the same moment that Nevers' Hispano broke into song. An orderly came running from the Headquarters building, waving frantically. He sprang up on the Camel's wing.

"Colonel Leggett says not to let you leave the field!" he gasped nervously.

"Beat it!"

"I got orders," the office man repeated. "I'll have to—"

Drummond grasped the man by the collar, and his huge arm swung the orderly carelessly to the ground. "Beat it, sonny," Drummond advised gently.

Then he opened the throttle, and Camel and Spad rose together into the gathering twilight. Facing toward the front lines, Drummond's square face broke into a slow grin. He sniffed the cold night air like a warhorse scenting the smoke of battle once more.

Nevers winged close, cut his throttle and motioned for Drummond to do the same.

"You're a fool, Monk!" the lanky flyer shouted. "You're A.W.O.L.! You're heading for a general court!"

"I know it!" Drummond yelled back, still grinning. "But I'd rather be a flying fool than a moss-covered student instructor!"

Nevers nodded. "Say, how about stopping at the 36th and putting them wise? Their C.O. may not be so thick-headed as Barringer!"

Drummond waved his agreement and both motors resumed their interrupted roar. The big Yank looked down at the dark ground, picking up familiar landmarks. There was the old chateau near Chevigny, and the silver streak of the river.

The entire sector appeared like a clear-cut picture in his mind. This small salient in the American lines was held by two

regiments of infantry, three batteries of field artillery and the 33rd and 36th Pursuit Squadrons. The salient could never be held by the ground troops alone without aerial co-operation. If anything *did* happen necessitating the withdrawal of those two squadrons, Drummond knew that there were no others that could be spared to take their places. The salient would simply be abandoned, in that case, since from a military viewpoint it was of scant value. Why, then, was von Kransborg so anxious, as he appeared to be, to strike at the 33rd and its companion outfit? Drummond knew the German's reputation well enough to feel sure that von Kransborg never exercised his devilish talents on small scale plans.

Abruptly Nevers banked right, toward the 36th. Drummond ceased puzzling, content only with the realization that he was temporarily, at least, free from humdrum duties. With characteristic nonchalance he disregarded the fact that he had placed himself in a jam that might result in a Leavenworth prison sentence, or worse.

An early moon slid its silver arc over the horizon as Spad and Camel cut down toward the dark drome below. Nevers fired a green Very flare, followed by a red one—the signal for landing lights. But no lights appeared!

Puzzled, the two Yanks circled the field. Drummond felt a growing sense of disaster. There was something about the absolute silence down there that tuned his nerves to bowstring tautness. A second zooming of the field revealed a dozen or more small dark blots scattered upon it. Then, as Drummond banked around at the north end of the drome, there came a muffled, hissing explosion, followed instantly by a gush of flame.

In the sudden glare, both flyers saw that a ship was burning on the field, and that a dark figure sat motionless in the pit. Drummond shot his ancient ship

earthward, with Nevers close behind.

That landing was a nightmare to Drummond. Three times he was forced to rudder his coasting plane hastily aside to avoid striking those dark blots. Had it not been for the brief light afforded by the burning ship, both Spad and Camel would have cracked up. With a sudden surge of horror, Drummond realized that those black forms were human bodies!

Both ships rudded around to halt a few yards apart. Nevers came running over, excited questions tumbling from his lips. Drummond fished a flashlight from his pocket.

"Let's look around," he said grimly.

The burning plane was by now a glowing heap of coals. Drummond remembered the silent figure in the pit and his face tightened. Yet somehow, he felt certain that the man had been dead before the flames reached him.

"God!" the word burst in a choked voice from Nevers. He stood looking down at something on the ground over which he had stumbled. Drummond clicked on his light.

The object was the body of a man—rather, what *had* been a body. Now it was a shapeless mass of bloody flesh. Drummond, hardened though he was, turned away, sickened.

"Come on," he croaked. "Let's see if any of 'em are alive."

Across that tarmac of the dead the two men stalked grimly. A dozen times they paused to inspect other shattered corpses. If there was a solitary living thing on that field it could not be found. The ghastly silence of the grave pervaded the entire drome.

"It must have taken 'em by surprise," Drummond muttered harshly, staring down at a field guard's body. The soldier's Springfield lay beside him, the magazine full. A half-smoked cigarette was in the man's hand.

"Judas!" Nevers' voice was a horri-

fied groan. "What in God's name—! It looks as if every man was the victim of a direct hit by a shell! That's not it, either. Monk, I'd say that these guys had been killed by an explosion *inside their bodies!* I mean, something that tore 'em to pieces from inside—like they'd swallowed a hand grenade or something!"

"That sounds crazy as hell," Drummond rasped. "But that's just the way it looks to me, too! Damn it, that isn't possible! But—look here! This mech was smoking a cigar, and it isn't burned out yet; that means this couldn't have happened long ago!"

Every bit of evidence pointed to the fact that the 36th had been given no slightest warning of the death about to strike them. The aircraft machine guns mounted in the ground pits were clean, unfired. Near one hangar a huddled group of bodies suggested that the pilots of the bat patrol had stood there, awaiting the word to take off. Just outside the door of the operations office was a shattered body dressed in the remnants of a major's uniform.

CHAPTER TWO

Demons of the Dark

NEVERS' dark face had turned ashen when the inspection was completed. "This . . . this is one of those things that just can't happen—but did! Monk, anybody that can explain this is good! I've got Indian blood, Monk, and my ancestors would lay this to evil spirits! I'm not so sure they—"

"Evil spirits is right," Drummond ripped savagely. "But I'll bet I can name the evil spirit that's behind it! Blacky, there's something big, something devilish, back of all this! I—"

He broke off as he glimpsed a crouching figure scuttling across the field. Drummond flipped out his heavy Colt,

then reconsidered. He lunged in swift pursuit, Nevers at his heels. The fugitive shape turned like a cornered rat, headed desperately toward a hangar. Drummond gained steadily, and his quarry squealed with terror as the big Yank dove forward in a flying tackle. The captured man fought for a moment with the gibbering ferocity of a madman. As Nevers helped him lift the fellow to his feet, Drummond thought the comparison not far wrong.

The captive, dressed in an enlisted man's olive drab uniform, glared at the two pilots insanely. Drummond shook him roughly. Except for a bloody flesh wound across the chest, the man seemed uninjured.

"What happened?" Drummond snapped sharply. "What killed these men?"

"I . . . don't know!" the soldier slavered wildly. "Nobody knew! They just died! They dropped like flies. No noise, nothing—just death! A few got away—it almost got me! Oh, God!"

The fellow's incoherent story trailed off in strangled laughter. Drummond ripped off his own shirt, managed to bandage the man's bleeding chest with strips torn from the garment. But fifteen minutes later the soldier was dead.

"Plain fright killed him," Drummond declared. "Maybe he wasn't too intelligent to begin with, but he saw enough here tonight to upset his reason. I don't know that he's to be blamed, either!"

"Let's get out of here," Nevers choked. "I've seen plenty!"

In the growing dawn his face looked pale and sick. Suddenly Nevers stiffened, staring curiously at Drummond's bared torso. "What're those numbers and figures tattooed on your shoulder?" he asked, pointing.

Drummond shrugged. "You tell me. They've always been there, as long as I can remember." He returned to the mo-

ment. "Listen, by this time, if there were survivors, the story must have spread. There'll be more hell popping here. Let's blow."

"Right. When Barringer hears of this, it may jolt him so that he'll be glad to have you back. He could fix it with Leggett if he wanted to."

"Not only that," Drummond muttered. "I'd like to get hold of that letter left me by Dad, if it's at the 33rd. I've got a hunch—. Never mind, come on."

Nevers paused at the wing of the Spad. "There couldn't have been a bombing raid," he ventured. "No craters in the field; nothing to keep our guys from taking off."

"Nothing but death!" the big ace grated.

Both ships dodged past the macabre figures on the 36th's tarmac and arced into the gray morning sky. As they turned toward the 33rd's base, a sudden horrible thought struck Drummond like a blow between the eyes. Suppose the same ghastly fate had visited his own field! He breathed a sigh of relief a half hour later as he glimpsed several Spads rising from a field a mile ahead of them. That was the 33rd, and the dawn patrol was just leaving. Not yet, at least, had the terror struck the squadron.

The patrol was barely out of sight when Drummond and Nevers landed.

Save for the mechanics assigned to the dawn flight, the field seemed still to be sleeping. They left the ships in a non-com's charge and turned toward the long barracks.

"I want to get my mail before Barringer spots 'us, if possible," Drummond explained. "He may not be around yet."

He had barely spoken when they rounded the corner of a hangar and almost collided with the Squadron Commander. Major Barringer, a short, rotund officer with a hard, lined face, halted abruptly. His glance flicked to Drummond, and the black eyes hardened.

"Captain Drummond! You have the impudence to come back here after what you've done? Don't you realize that orders are out for your arrest as a deserter?"

"Never mind that now," Drummond snapped tensely. "Has any report come through about what happened at the 36th last night?"

Barringer's thin face tightened. "What do you know about that? Some garbled story came in a few minutes ago, but it was sheer nonsense. The man who was talking was apparently drunk; in the throes of *delirium tremens*, I'd say. Naturally, I paid no attention to him!"

"But, you fool, it was all true! Nevers and I saw part of it! You've got to double your field guards, take every precau-



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tion. Don't you realize that this drome will be next?"

"You'd like to make me ridiculous, wouldn't you, Drummond? But it won't work. I'm taking no more chances with you!" The S.C.'s voice rose in a roar. I'm placing you under arrest right now, Drummond! Sergeant! Come here!"

Drummond took a swift step forward, his fists clenching. Abruptly he halted, drew back. Startled horror swept over his angry face.

Barringer had taken a single shuffling step, his face contorted with amazed agony. Instantly both Nevers and Drummond heard a tiny, muffled explosion. Barringer's body seemed to leap straight into the air, then sag slowly to the ground. Blood poured from nose and mouth and ears, and his snapping black eyes assumed the blank stare of the dead!

"God!" Nevers gasped. "Monk, that—that explosion occurred *inside his body!*"

Drummond knew that Nevers' impossible words were true, even as he jerked his eyes away from the awful sight before him, to shoot desperate glances about the quiet field. There was no sound, nothing in sight. Then a sergeant of the field guards pounded into view, two armed soldiers beside him. From the Operations Office came an officer, Colt swinging in his hand.

"What have you done to th' Skipper, Cap'n?" the sergeant rasped, staring at the corpse with bulging eyes.

"Done?" Drummond choked dully. "We didn't do anything! Something struck him down, that's all! We were just standing here talking to him when it happened!"

The officer shoved through the group until he faced Drummond and Nevers accusingly. The big pilot recognized him as the new adjutant who had joined the squadron just before Drummond himself had been transferred.

"I heard part of the conversation," the

adjutant shrilled. "The Major was about to arrest this man when he was killed! Sergeant, place both these officers under guard. I accuse them of the murder of Major Barringer!"

For the moment Drummond was too stunned to resist. Before he recovered, both Nevers and himself had been disarmed. "This way," the sergeant growled, pointing. The two soldiers, nervous enough to make the Springfields in their hands doubly dangerous, fell in behind.

"I'm notifying the Chief of Air Service immediately!" the adjutant shouted. "I'll see this thing cleaned up at once!"

"Shall me make a break?" Nevers muttered.

Drummond shook his head. "Not now; we wouldn't have a chance. Besides, I want to see the General!"

In a few moments both pilots found themselves in the sturdy field guardhouse. The two soldiers remained outside the door on sentry duty.

"I never liked Barringer, but I wouldn't have wished that fate on him," Drummond brooded. "Blacky, we're in a jam! We're in this mess to our necks. Apparently we were the only men close enough to kill the C.O.!"

All through the day the two prisoners went over every bit of the evidence they had discovered. Shortly after dusk a muddy staff car roared past the guardhouse. Drummond caught a glimpse of the flags on the fender, of the erect, gray-mustached officer in the tonneau.

"Rocky! There's General Nash himself! If he's taken the trouble to come clear up here, it must mean they're making an official investigation of the slaughter at the 36th! Another thing; I almost forgot that letter of mine!"

Drummond stepped to the door and spoke to one of the soldiers. "Listen buddy; go over to Lieutenant Nevers' hutment and get my mail, will you?"

The sentry hesitated. "Well, I guess

that'll be okay. Keep your eyes open, Joe."

The soldier was back directly, shoving a bundle of letters through the barred window. Drummond riffled through them swiftly, fastened on a heavy envelope yellowed by age. He was in the act of ripping it open when Nevers' voice jerked him to the door. The lanky flyer stood there, pointing silently across the field.

Less than hundred yards away, two of the field guards were plainly visible in the light of the moon that rose over the drome. The light filtered through the trees that bordered the tarmac, casting an unreal glow over the scene.

EVEN as his eyes fell on the sentries, Drummond saw one of them leap spasmodically, then fall in a twitching heap. The second soldier stood gazing wildly around him, his gun seeking a target. At the same instant a ghastly scream broke from his gaping mouth. Then he too seemed to jump several feet into the air, to drop across his mate's body!

The captive Yanks' brains turned numb with horror at the scene that followed. Attracted by the scream, men were pouring from the hangars, from the barracks and office. And one by one they stumbled and fell, their shattered bodies making formless black blots on the moon-swept field!

Someone twisted the office siren into full voice. Its wailing, banshee shriek added a ghoulish note to the panicky confusion. Officers shouted meaningless orders, words that fell unheeded on stunned ears. Some of the men began shooting wildly, adding to the unholy din. Drummond's huge arms were jerking at the iron bars, his blood cold with horror. In terrible silence, save for the uproar caused by the victims themselves, the slaughter went on.

Flaming fury added to the enormous strength of Monk Drummond, and under

his frenzied efforts he felt one of the bars weaken and give. He thrust an arm through, groping for the guard who stood against the door, frozen with terror. At the same moment he felt the man's body leap almost out of his grasp, felt flesh and bone under his fingers turn to pulp as a muffled explosion hissed out. As the soldier's lifeless corpse drooped, Drummond snatched the key ring from his belt. Awkwardly he jammed a key into the lock and twisted it, and the door swung open. Drummond and Nevers surged from the cell, sickened by the mad scene of catastrophe.

Drummond knew that under ordinary circumstances these men would have fought coolly and without fear. If this had been a Hun bombing raid, a field strafe, or anything within their experience, there would have been no terror or confusion. But this death that struck in ghastly silence, giving no chance to fight back, was more than human nerves could endure.

A dark figure paused beside them. "This way!" a voice called stridently. Instinctively both Yanks wheeled to fall in beside the figure. Together they cut into the trees bordering the north end of the field.

Suddenly, as they emerged into a patch of brilliant moonlight, Drummond caught a closer sight of their companion. A bell of warning flashed in his mind. The man wore a German uniform, unnoticed in the darkness until now!

"Blacky!" Drummond yelled. "Look out—!"

The warning choked in his throat as, from both sides, indistinct shapes lunged at them. Unarmed save for his fists, Drummond tried to halt, to swing at his attacker. The man dodged, then leaped. A wet cloth saturated with a stinging, cloying odor sloshed against his face. Chloroform! As Drummond felt his senses reeling, he was dimly aware that

two broad-winged shapes loomed before them. The last thing he saw was Nevers' body wilting to the ground; the last thing he heard was a coarse voice exclaiming in German: "*Das ist gut! We will follow immediately!*"

As consciousness came streaming back, the first thing of which Drummond was aware was a roaring thunder beside his head and an icy rush of air in his face. He opened his eyes, struggling to orient himself. Abruptly he realized that he was stretched flat on the wing of a plane, that the thunder he heard was the roar of a straining motor.

Drummond had inhaled barely enough of the chloroform to put him out, and now his head cleared rapidly. The ship was a two-seater, and in the rear pit he could make out a slumped head. Nevers? Impossible to tell then. Drummond recalled that there had been two of the planes in the meadow near the 33rd's drome. On either side loomed the indistinct outlines of other planes.

Drummond began a cold, intelligent struggle against the cords which bound his hands to the struts.

The job had been hurriedly done, and Drummond discovered that by twisting his arms sidewise he could rasp the cords against the steel brace sockets. Mile after mile hurtled under the Hun ship's wings as the big Yank worked. Sweat streamed down his face despite the cold air. In the rear pit he saw the hunched body straighten, recognized Nevers' dark face.

Tensing every muscle in his huge body, Drummond gave a final tremendous jerk with his left hand. Under the pressure the weakened cords snapped! His freed hand fumbled in a trouser pocket and fished out a heavy jack-knife. Awkwardly, Drummond managed to snap the large blade open. One swift slash freed his right hand. As the rope gave way, Drummond's body slid perilously close to the edge of the wing. He saved himself by

a last grab, then drew his body half erect.

At that instant the Boche pilot became aware of what was happening. Drummond saw his snarling face turn toward him, then a hand appeared over the pit combing, clutching a gleaming Luger. The pilot fired, just as Nevers leaned far forward, clubbing his bound hands down on the Hun's head. The momentary distraction threw the German's aim off, and the bullet whistled harmlessly through the wing.

Suddenly the two-seater nosed upward, and Nevers was slammed back in his seat. Now the lanky American could not reach to interfere again. The pilot fired a second time, but Drummond wriggled convulsively aside. He realized that his captor was aiming only to disable him. Until then Drummond had given no thought to the motives behind this kidnaping. Now he understood that the Boche wanted him *alive!*

Even so, a bullet-pierced arm or leg might easily cause him to lose his insecure hold on the wing. As the Hun turned toward him a third time, Drummond threw back his arm and hurled the knife with all his strength!

Instantly he knew his aim had been true. The pilot half rose in his seat, both hands clutching at the handle of the knife. The blade was buried to the hilt in his neck. As the controls went lax the two-seater lurched, nosed into a whining dive. Desperately Drummond lunged at the cockpit, caught it, and drew his body up.

One jerk released the knife. The Hun was on his feet now, tottering, already dead. Drummond caught him by the coat, heaved with all his strength.

The fellow's body shot grotesquely overside as Drummond pulled his own frame into the vacated pit. The next second he was battling the downward rush of the Hanover with every bit of skill and strength he possessed. With maddening slowness the nose lifted, the plane leveled

out. Tree tops hurtled by below, so close that Drummond's heart clogged his throat.

A sudden staccato roar from above jerked him alert. He half-rolled the big ship at the same instant, and a winged shape flashed past, whirled to come charging back. Spandau fire split the gray darkness. Drummond zoomed, swiftly twisted the heavy crate over. For a moment the other ship was silhouetted through the ringsights and Drummond's thumbs contracted on the stick trigger. The Spandaus ripped out a savage burst of fire. The Hun wavered into a spin, striking the ground before the first turn was hardly completed.

Out of the darkness the Yank glimpsed other ships approaching, and he shot the Hanover into erratic flight. No chance to fight now, with Nevers helpless in the rear pit. One by one the pursuers faded from sight as Drummond hedge-hopped close to the dark earth.

Satisfied that he had eluded the enemy, Drummond turned, tossed the knife back to Nevers. The darkness and maneuvers of the fight had confused him; he only felt sure that they were in German air. He banked in the direction he hoped was home—just as the motor coughed convulsively and died!

CHAPTER THREE

Warning From the Dead

A DEAD-STICK landing at night in Hun territory! Drummond forced the thought of a crash from his mind, concentrated on finding a landing field within the Hanover's limited gliding range. The ship had been flying low when the motor cut out, and almost before he knew it Drummond was skimming the two-seater close to the tops of the trees. At barely the last second he picked up the glitter of a small stream, and beside it a narrow strip of bank.

The next moment the Hanover's wheels struck, held to the ground. "Unfasten your belt, Blacky!" Drummond yelled, following his own advice. The words were scarcely out of his mouth before the two-seater reached the edge of the bank and pitched down into the river!

Drummond felt himself shooting forward through space. He went under the surface, came up gasping, peering about for sign of Nevers. The Hanover's tail thrust up above the surface like a grotesque signpost. Drummond cursed; then, thankful that he was not encumbered by a heavy flying coat, he drew a long breath and dove.

His groping fingers felt along the fuselage, encountered a kicking figure. Nevers' coat was obviously caught by some obstruction. Lungs bursting for air, Drummond braced his feet against the fuselage and gave a mighty tug at Nevers' body. Leather ripped loose and both men shot to the surface. Drummond towed Nevers to the bank and worked frantically, using artificial respiration.

Nevers jerked convulsively, coughed, then sat up weakly. "Close!" he gasped. "Thanks, Monk. Where in hell are we, anyway?"

Drummond shrugged. "About twenty miles behind the German lines, I guess—judging from the river and that town we flew over just before the fight! It looked like Champaille to me."

"God, what a night;" Nevers remembered the scene back at the 33rd's drome and shuddered. "I can't figure this, Monk. Why'd the Huns want to snatch us? Why didn't we get the same treatment as the others?"

Drummond shook his head, then made a sudden grab at his pocket. "That letter! It'll be so soaked we can't read it by this time!"

He dragged out the soggy envelope without hope, then his eyes brightened as he saw that the contents were wrapped in

oiled silk. The next moment he produced a water-proof match case and began reading eagerly. Nevers struck match after match, peering over Drummond's shoulder.

The significance of the letter, written in a bold, scrawling hand, seemed to leap at them. It ran:

Dear Son:

If my instructions are followed, you will not read this until you are old enough to realize the terrible responsibility I am leaving you. Two months ago, while working in my laboratory on a commercial process, quite by accident I made a terrible discovery. It is a combination of chemicals, that, properly combined, result in an explosive so deadly that the mind can hardly comprehend its destructive qualities.

My assistant, a man named Frederich von Kransborg, knew what I had discovered, and kept hounding me for the secret. At that time I was working in France. I suspected that von Kransborg had a plan to sell the formula to some foreign power. Accordingly, I had certain numbers and letters tattooed on your shoulder, so that there could never be any danger of their loss. Those numbers are the key to the code formula, which I hid in my chateau a mile east of Chevigny. I then returned to America, bringing you with me. I placed you in safe hands—you were then but five years old—because I knew von Kransborg was trailing me. Yesterday he and his gang found me, took me to a remote spot and tortured me for the secret of the explosive. I kept the secret in spite of the torture. Von Kransborg left me for dead. Indeed, I am dying now, but shall live long enough to complete this letter.

I am sorry now that I did not destroy the formula entirely. I dare trust no one with it but you. When you read this, go to France, to the chateau I have described. The formula is hidden behind the wall, in the foundation near the northeast corner. A red painted circle will show you the spot. I am not a vindictive man, but for the safety of humanity, destroy von Kransborg—and the formula. *Drummondite* is capable of destroying civilization—if its secret falls into the wrong hands. Von Kransborg is

crafty; he may find the formula before you read this. But without the key, inked on your skin, it is useless. Do not fail me in this.

Your loving father,
Paul Drummond.

For a long moment both men were silent, held by the spell of this missive from the past. Then Drummond rose slowly to his feet. "This explains a lot of things," he muttered. "Someway von Kransborg has learned that I possess part of the secret. That explains his attempt at kidnapping me."

"The Huns who came after you probably couldn't be sure which was you, so they grabbed both of us to be sure!" Nevers exclaimed.

"Right," Drummond nodded. "And these attacks on the 36th and 33rd—von Kransborg wants a chance to get at the chateau. If the salient is straightened, the place would be in German territory."

He held a match to the fifteen year old letter, watched it crumple under the flame.

"We've got to get back across the lines!" Nevers cried excitedly. "We've got to get to that old chateau at Chevigny!"

"Right again—but how? We're miles back of the Hun lines. No chance to work our way back through the trenches; it might take us days. In the meantime, von Kransborg may strike at other squadrons with that hellish killing method of his. If the infantry fell back a few miles, as they'll have to do without air protection, he'd have his hands on the chateau before we got back. Somehow he's found out about it. No, our only chance is to grab a Boche ship and fly back!"

The hour was still not long past midnight, and Drummond recalled that somewhere along the river area was a Hun airdrome. Together the two Yanks set off through the darkness at the fastest pace they could maintain.

Once they passed a road, so close that

they could make out the sound of marching feet and hear the guttural talk of the soldiers. For half an hour they crouched there before venturing on. A mile further along they came upon a bridge and crossed it, to travel parallel to the road on the other side. Shortly after, a plane droned overhead, flying low. Suddenly the motor was cut and the wail of the wind in wires and braces was plainly audible.

"That ship's landing!" Drummond whispered. "Come on. There must be a drome close by!"

They cut away from the road, emerging almost immediately in a long, wooded valley. The trees, however, proved to be only a thin straggling border about the center of the valley, which was smooth and broad. Through a gap in the trees, Drummond glimpsed huge black buildings arranged in a row.

Five minutes later the two Americans crouched in the shelter of the trees, staring out at the big airdrome. Beyond the hangars were barracks and shops, and off to one side stood a large stone building from which shone screened lights. Dark figures moved over the field and several planes were lined up in front of the hangars.

"If we could only get to one of them!" Drummond whispered hoarsely. "Or if I could just get my hands on von Kransborg's throat! I wouldn't care much what happened then!"

Nevers peered along the border of trees. "I don't see any field guards. Shall we try it?"

"Around this way. The trees come up almost to the buildings. They'll cover us for awhile."

Drummond led the way around the edge of the field until they reached a spot where they were within a hundred yards of the planes, yet shielded by the woods.

"Now!" he whispered.

INSTANTLY they started from cover, sprinting straight toward the nearest ship. Drummond had covered barely ten yards of the distance when he tripped heavily. At the same moment he felt a paralyzing shock course through his body. Somewhere nearby a bell jangled metallicly, and he knew that he had tripped over a charged wire. That explained the apparent absence of field sentries.

A few feet away Nevers rose shakily, swearing softly. Voices shouted on the field and a whistle shrilled. A raucous German voice bellowed for the corporal of the guards.

"We've got to clear out!" Drummond hissed, seizing Nevers' arm. The slender Yank had obviously received a more severe shock than Drummond himself. They started to run clumsily, their muscles still jerking from the heavy charge.

Heavy footsteps pounded through the trees behind them, and as an open glade momentarily revealed the fugitives, their pursuers opened fire with a scattered volley. Drummond, a few feet in the lead, jerked to a sudden halt as the solid earth opened in front of him. Another step and he would have plunged headlong into the dark depths of a deep ravine. The incline was almost sheer; there was no possible means of descending it with hopes of coming out alive.

Drummond turned left as the guards behind drew nearer. They found themselves racing back toward the field, cut off from any other direction of flight. Without hesitating, the two running men crashed from the trees, sprinted desperately toward the line of ships. Behind them Mausers crashed and slugs whistled dangerously close.

The breath came in rasping bursts from Drummond's tortured lungs. His huge body, built for power and strength, could not continue the mad pace as easily as the slender, lighter Nevers. The latter drew steadily ahead until he realized that Drum-

mond had dropped back. Then he slowed for the big man to catch up.

"Go on, you fool!" Drummond gasped. "You can make it; never mind me!"

"We'll make it together or not at all," Nevers panted.

Even as he spoke, a rifle cracked from one of the hangars and Nevers stumbled, a low groan forcing itself from his lips.

"Blacky!" Drummond stooped, snatching up his companion's body as lightly as if he were a child. He stumbled heavily on, his heart sinking as the significance of Nevers' dead weight struck home. A glance showed a great dark stain on the lanky American's head, and blood dribbled stickily over Drummond's hands.

He'd made it! A dark winged shape loomed directly in front of him, and through the pounding roar in his ears Drummond was aware of the soft *thock-thock-thock* of an idling motor. He started to lift Nevers to the pit when three German mechanics suddenly rounded the wingtip. One held a glinting pistol, and the others were armed with heavy wrenches. Drummond knew he had no chance of getting to the cockpit. With a roar of berserk fury, he eased Nevers' limp body to the ground and leaped at the three Huns like an enraged grizzly.

The fellow with the automatic fired once, the slug ripping the air an inch away from Drummond's face. Before the mech could pull the trigger again Drummond was on them, an avalanche of destruction. He ripped the pistol from its owner's hand with one wild lunge. The man felt himself lifted, gripped by iron hands. Then Drummond threw the limp body into the faces of the man's charging comrades. They stumbled backward, bowled over like tenpins.

But the brief conflict had given needed time to the other pursuers. They closed in now, a growling pack. The swift, fierce joy of primordial combat surged through Drummond's veins. He knew he was

doomed, knew that this would be his last free-for-all. But before he went down he'd partially square things for Nevers' death!

Under the impact of his slamming fists men went down as if struck by lightning. None of them moved after the blow landed, and two lay with queerly twisted necks. The press was too close for gun work; they fought in a snarling pack of writhing bodies, the only sounds the dull thud of fists on flesh and an occasional gasp of pain.

Twice Drummond's big form went down, disappearing under a mass of vicious boots and fists. And twice he reared to his feet, like a bear throwing off a pack of hounds. He knew that the end was very close, that the next time he went down there would be no getting up.

At that moment one of the men he had bowled over seized his ankles and gave a mighty jerk. Drummond swayed, just as two Huns struck him at the same time. His knees sagged and he toppled over like a falling tower. Before his pain-shot eyes a dark figure poised, saw-toothed bayonet quivering for the stroke.

Simultaneously a hoarse voice bawled: "Alive, you fools! Take the *schwein* alive!"

The bayonet swerved, and in its stead the rifle barrel slammed against the side of Drummond's head. He sank into an enveloping darkness shot through with scarlet flashes of pain. . . .

A blinding light poured against his closed eyes, and an acrid odor swept up his nostrils into his brain. Monk Drummond stirred, lifted his drooping head. His eyes fluttered open, closed quickly, then opened again. Dully he stared around him, his pain-drugged brain taking in one impression at a time.

He was seated in a long, brightly lighted room. Maps and faded oil paintings partially covered the walls and a rich-hued rug was spread on the floor. Drummond discovered that the more serious of

his multitude of cuts and bruises had been bandaged. A uniformed German, wearing the insignia of a medical officer, withdrew a bottle from Drummond's nose.

"You feel better now, *ja*?"

Drummond nodded, tried to lift a hand to his aching head. The hand remained motionless, and he saw that he was bound hand and foot to the chair in which he sat. Obviously, after the fight he had put up, no chances were being taken. Drummond's eyes moved on, settled on a second figure seated a few feet away. A relieved croak came from Drummond's bruised lips.

"Blacky! You're okay?"

Nevers nodded wanly. A bloody bandage encircled his head. "Yeah, that slug only creased my skull. I heard the Jerries talking about the scrap you staged, Monk. I wouldn't have missed it for a hundred bucks!"

"Never mind that," Drummond grunted. "I thought you were finished. Know where we are?"

Nevers' lean face tightened. "We're the guests of your old pal, Major von Kransborg! He's paid me one visit, but you were still out cold."

A dismayed oath twitched Drummond's mouth. Von Kransborg! They'd stumbled straight into the power of the one man they should have avoided! Small chance now of ever carrying out his father's dying request. With half the formula in the German's possession—The sound of an opening door cut Drummond's desperate thoughts short. From the far end of the room a man advanced toward them, flanked by two alert *unteroffiziers*.

"You were speaking of me?" the man asked. "I am Frederick von Kransborg!"

Save for the uniform, Drummond would hardly have known whether to call this creature a man or a gorilla. Von Kransborg's face was flat, pendulous-lipped and lighted by tiny, deep-set eyes under a jutting brow. Coarse black hair ran in an unbroken line far down his fore-

head. Heavy, long arms dangled almost to his knees, ending in enormous hands, also covered with hair.

The gorilla likeness ended with the eyes which, though they held a glowing, insensate cruelty, gleamed with satanic intelligence. Von Kransborg spoke again, his voice coarse, guttural, animal-like.

"So you are young Drummond! *Ja*, I can see the resemblance, *mein Herr*. You look like your father, there is no doubt. But you never knew your father, *nein*? He—ah, passed on when you were a child. A very clever man, but like so many Americans, too soft-hearted—too concerned with the good of humanity. He did not have the true scientific mind. *Verstehen sie!*"

"I understand that I'd break that murdering back of yours if my hands were free!" Drummond roared.

"I wonder," von Kransborg teetered on his heels, eyeing Drummond's half-exposed body speculatively. "You are powerful, *ja*. But so am I. Once, on a bet, I fought a fullgrown leopard. The beast had its claws pulled out, but otherwise was not handicapped. I broke that leopard's back, Yankee!"

The Hun's pride in his strength was so obvious that Drummond had the swift hunch that the fact might be useful later on.

Von Kransborg drew a sheet of paper from his pocket and stared at it thoughtfully.

"Very interesting, those symbols I discovered on your shoulder, Captain Drummond," he said slowly. "To most people they would mean nothing. To me, a scientist, they have a meaning—as far as they go. But they are not complete. I have the idea that certain other numbers and symbols exist which would complete a certain formula. Do you follow me, Captain Drummond?"

The German chuckled, a bestial sound that seemed to rumble throughout the en-

tire room. "I have means of getting information, Captain, that you would never dream of. I knew that you possessed *part* of the formula, and I know that the rest is hidden somewhere in the Chateau de Chevigny. That district is so overrun with your troops that it would be suicide for a spy to try to get in there undetected, even if I had one I could trust. That is why I have gone to great pains to see that the Chateau returns to German hands. Yet even then it might be difficult for me to get the formula. Your capture simplifies matters."

"You have it all figured out, I suppose," Drummond jeered.

"Exactly." Von Kransborg turned to one of the guards made a significant gesture. The guard left the room, to reappear a few moments later, shoving a bound prisoner before him. The newcomer was a spare, erect man, gray-haired and gray-mustached. The insignia of a major general gleamed on his torn uniform. He returned von Kransborg's triumphant leer with a cold, steady glance.

"General Nash!" The exclamation jerked from Drummond involuntarily.

"Ja, General Nash," the Hun smirked. "He was captured at the same time you and your friend were picked up. I understand the General is commander of your American Air Service, *nicht wahr?* I also believe he is considered one of your most valuable officers!"

"It might be very unpleasant for German captives if I am not treated as a prisoner of war," the General remarked quietly.

"Bah!" Von Kransborg thrust his brutish face close to the Chief's. "What do I care about German captives? Do you think I would let a little matter of reprisals stand between me and the achievement of a fifteen year ambition? With that formula in my possession, I hold the future of the world in my hands! The future of the world!"

CHAPTER FOUR

Satan's Hostages

"GERMANY must bid high to buy the secret, once I possess it. And by dawn I *will* possess it! Captain Drummond, you will take off in an American ship that I have here. You will fly directly to the Chateau de Chevigny, find the formula, and deliver it to me here!"

"Do you think I'm crazy?" Drummond demanded bitterly.

"No, I think you're like most other Americans, idealistic and soft. You will do as I say, never doubt that."

"You don't think you're taking any chances? Suppose I forget to come back?"

Von Kransborg spoke a guttural phrase to the *unteroffizier* at his side. For the second time the man left the room. As he waited, Drummond's pulse beat with cold dread. Already he could see the sinister scheme back of von Kransborg's proposition. The stamp of scuffling footsteps sounded at a door behind Drummond, and he craned his neck just as two burly soldiers thrust a bound, writhing man into the room. The prisoner was obviously a German pilot, for he wore the cavalry uniform affected by Boche flyers. Stark terror was reflected in his rolling eyes and twisted face.

"For *Gott's* sake, Herr Major, have mercy!" the man screamed. He would have fallen to his knees had it not been for the two soldiers. With the bestial grins of professional executioners they hauled him erect, thrust him back against the wall.

"This man was in command of the flight sent to capture you tonight," von Kransborg explained, satanic anticipation glittering in his sunken eyes. "When you, Captain Drummond, overpowered your pilot, it was this man's duty to recapture you. He failed; only good fortune saved my plan from defeat. He has also been presumptuous enough to protest some of my actions. I am therefore taking this

means of showing you an example. Guards, step back!"

Drummond sat frozen by horror at what he knew he was about to witness. As though realizing that pleas and escape were alike impossible, the German flyer drew himself up stiffly.

"I only wish to say, Herr Major, that you are a disgrace to the German race!"

Von Kransborg stood facing his victim, evidently enjoying the delayed torture he was inflicting. Then: "This is what happens to those who fail von Kransborg's orders!"

He lifted his hand, pointed one finger stiffly at the prisoner. Instantly the man's body leaped convulsively into the air. Drummond heard a muffled concussion, and the next moment the Boche pilot fell to the floor, a scarlet flood pouring from eyes, nose and mouth. The body twitched spasmodically once or twice, then was still. Von Kransborg made a scornful gesture to the guards. "Take the carrion out!" He swung back on Drummond, his piggy eyes shining with yellow glints of cruelty.

"That was merely an example of what I can do, of the fate met by those who try to cross me. You will obey my orders in regard to that flight! If, within two

hours, you are not back here with the information I desire, you realize what will happen to your friend and to General Nash! I can make that death even more painful than the case you have witnessed, I assure you!"

Cold sweat poured from Drummond's face. He felt horror to the point of sickness, but even more than that, he was conscious of a surge of sheer, killing fury. This was the man who had tortured and murdered his father! And now he was asked to do something that would give that man an incredible power of destruction! He glanced at Nevers' ashen face, at the waxen features of General Nash. Blacky managed a wan smile.

"Tell him to go to hell, Monk!" he said gamely. "Don't worry about us."

"Your friend is right, Captain," the Chief of Air Service added calmly. "Nothing that could happen to us would matter compared to the evil this devil could commit!"

"No!" Drummond's answer was a harsh croak. "I can't . . . I won't let him murder you; either of you! All right, von Kransborg, I accept! I'll go!"

The German nodded. "I knew you would see reason. You will be escorted

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to the lines by some of my ships. Guards! Bring the *Amerikaner* this way."

With the frenzied protests of Nevers and General Nash ringing in his ears, Drummond was led back to the field. All the way his brain raced back and forth over the execution of the German pilot. How had the thing been done? It was as if a time bomb in the man's body had suddenly exploded!

Out on the tarmac a Spad stood with warming engine. Drummond's eyes ran over it swiftly. There were Vickers on the cowling, but no ammo belts in the pit. Von Kransborg stepped close for a final warning.

"Remember, Captain! If you try to cross me, or fail to come back within the specified time, your companions will wish they'd never been born! And another thing—do not think you can deceive me by tampering with the formula once you find it. Any alterations in the symbols would be instantly apparent to me. Now you may go!"

Drummond slammed the throttle open with the gorilla-man's hateful voice still croaking in his ears. On either side of him a Fokker escort took the air at the same moment. Drummond turned toward the lines, flying mechanically. His duty seemed plain enough—to destroy the formula the moment he found it. It would be so easy, and in that course lay safety for himself as well. But as he recalled Nevers' grim smile and the iron courage of General Nash, Drummond knew that whatever the cost, he could not sacrifice those two lives. He cursed the German bitterly. Von Kransborg was a keen enough judge of human nature to realize exactly what Drummond would do. The big American's face set into desperate, determined lines. He would carry out von Kransborg's orders—then there must be some way in which the fiend could be outwitted.

As the lines stretched in irregular long

gashes below them, the Fokkers turned back. Drummond flew on, his brain churning. He glanced at his watch and saw that dawn was still nearly three hours away. The Spad thundered through the empty sky, straight toward the Chateau de Chevigny.

Drummond knew its location well enough. Many times he had taken his bearings by the huge pile of stone masonry. Now he found himself approaching it almost before he realized the distance he had covered. He sent the Spad shooting down toward the small field that lay within a quarter mile of the building. From Chevigny a searchlight suddenly stabbed its brilliant beam into the sky, then, as the watchers below caught the familiar co-carded circles, the light wavered and went out.

The Spad shot down, came abruptly into the slight wind and fishtailed to a smooth landing. Drummond clambered out, leaving the Hiss idling softly. Time might be an important factor later on.

As he reached a point a hundred feet from the dark building, Drummond was thankful for his cautious approach. He had caught a low murmur of voices close beside the south wall of the chateau. Stealthily he slipped closer, until he could make out the silhouette of Yank trench helmets and the gleam of a bayonet. Startled, he drew back. This was queer! There were soldiers on sentry duty around the building!

He hesitated only for a moment, then, as the two sentries separated to walk their beats, he stepped into the shadows not ten feet from the nearest guard. The dough-boy sauntered by, almost within arm's reach. Drummond launched his body in a swift attack that bore the man to the ground in a flash. Before the sentry could cry out, Drummond's fingers choked the shout back in his throat. The big flyer's right fist swung in a choppy arc, cracking against the soldier's jaw. Drummond felt

the man's body go completely limp.

Working swiftly in the darkness, he forced his handkerchief into the unconscious guard's mouth and bound him with his own belt. Leaving the helpless figure well back in the shadows, Drummond darted through an open doorway into the black maw of the chateau. He knew he must work fast, for almost any moment the second sentry might discover his missing companion.

Drummond hurried down a long flight of stone stairs, trying to recall the instructions contained in his father's letter. At the end of the steps a thick, iron-banded door loomed to the left. Drummond tugged at it, pulled it open. He found himself in what had once been the castle's armor room. As he pressed the button of the flashlight von Kransborg had given him, Drummond saw that the walls were covered with ancient weapons and relics of a long past age. It was evident that this was not the lowest level of the house, and he was about to leave the room when his light fastened on a huge table on which lay helmets, hauberks, greaves and various other pieces of armor. A sudden idea struck the big Yank. He picked up a shirt constructed of woven chain mail.

In the next moment Drummond had thrown off his own tunic and shirt, then he struggled into the armor. The shirt, though heavy, was flexible and did little to hamper his movements. A few seconds more and his own shirt and tunic were again on.

EXPECTING each moment to hear a yell from the remaining guard, Drummond located another set of stairs. This time, when the bottom was reached, he found himself in a dank dungeon. The floor was of huge stones sunken into the earth, while slimy moss crawled over the mouldering walls. Instinctively Drummond knew he had the right room. He

paused until he had located the *right* corner, then began feverishly digging away the crusted mould and moss. At the same instant a hoarse yell sounded outside the chateau. Somewhere a door banged hollowly, boots pounded on stone.

Drummond redoubled his efforts until he had cleared a sizable space on the corner wall. But there was no red circle! Desperately he scanned every inch of the dark stones. Then he stiffened in triumph. On one of them appeared a small dark blot, hardly discernible! He gave one end of the stone a shove, and the block swung smoothly inwards. A small stone niche was revealed, in which lay a packet wrapped in oiled silk!

He had no sooner thrust the packet into his tunic than he became aware that the steps were drawing nearer. Drummond raced up the winding stairs, expecting at each turn to come face to face with the searchers.

So suddenly that he stopped barely in time, he glimpsed light pouring from a door at the head of the stairs. A glance within revealed a long room, lamp-lighted. A huge table occupied half its length, and a half dozen American officers were standing in a group, listening to the excited guard's story.

"I tell you, Major, someone jumped my buddy and laid him out. They must be in the building now, 'cause we've been watching the doors. I put the other boys to work searching!"

"Keep looking!" the major replied. "If you find anyone, bring them here!"

Drummond drew back as the non-com started toward the hall. Hobnailed shoes pounded behind him. As he started down the corridor, two doughboys appeared like ghosts from a room at the end of the hall. They saw Drummond instantly and charged forward with excited shouts.

Cut off from all sides, the flyer whirled and lunged into the big room. There was a concert of startled oaths, then a half-

dozen automatics covered Drummond.

Drummond halted, his hands lifting.

"Very clumsy work, for a spy!" the grizzled major said curtly.

"I'm not a spy," Drummond snapped harshly. "I didn't know this building was in use. I came here for personal reasons!"

"I don't suppose you knew that this chateau was to be used as an American Intelligence base?" the major sneered. "What did you come for, then?"

"I—" Drummond hesitated. It would be worse than useless to tell the truth. And time was getting very short; even now he might be too late to reach von Kransborg in time.

"I think any further talk is useless," the G-2 officer growled. "You may be an American, as you claim. But the circumstances are highly suspicious, to say the least. If you are innocent you will have a chance to prove it at a trial! Sergeant, take this man into custody!"

Then, as the non-com moved forward purposefully, Drummond went desperately into action. The door at his back was solidly blocked by soldiers, but the window a few steps away was clear. He had no means of knowing how far above the ground he might be, but he whirled and lunged desperately for the opening.

Caught momentarily by surprise, the guards stood in stunned inaction until Drummond was throwing a leg over the stone sill. Then a Springfield banged vengefully behind him. The bullet caught the fugitive a glancing blow in the back, then caromed whining into the night. The impact almost pitched Drummond headlong into space. But the chain mail had turned the slug, and as he flung outward Drummond caught desperately at the ropes of vines that grew on the stone walls.

"I got him!" the sergeant was bawling triumphantly.

Drummond went down the vines hand over hand, every bruised muscle in his

body shrieking at the effort. Heads protruded from the window, oaths squalled down at him as more shots cracked out. But shooting downward is notoriously difficult, and as leaves snipped from the vines he loosened his hold and dropped.

The ten foot fall jarred him to the teeth, but he was up instantly, running in a zig-zag course toward the shadows.

Bullets whipped the dust all around him, and more than once struck the shirt of mail, sending Drummond sprawling with the force. Once one of those rifle balls struck squarely he knew that the old armor would not save him. Already those cursing doughboys must think he possessed a charmed life.

Dark figures belched from several different doorways as Drummond pounded through the fringe of trees and sprinted madly toward the Spad. If the ship had been discovered, or if the Hiss had stalled—! Both fears gave way to relief as he thudded up to the plane. The flailing prop still made a silver sheen in the moonlight. He crawled into the pit and batted the throttle open just as the foremost figure appeared before the ship's nose.

Before the menace of that spinning club the soldiers melted hastily aside. Drummond took the air in a hail of Yank lead and headed toward the lines with the Hiss straining at wide open gun. He knew that the word would be out to stop him as soon as phones could be reached.

A mile short of the lines, three Camels roared in from the side and made a desperate bid to overhaul him. But his lead was too great; the pursuers had chance for only a few long range bursts before the Spad had drawn out of gunshot. Fifteen minutes after they faded into the night, Drummond landed the Spad on von Kransborg's drome.

The moment the scout rolled to a halt, helmeted soldiers were dragging Drummond back into the big stone house. Von

Kransborg came forward eagerly, his brutish face jerking with excitement.

"I hope for your own sake that you succeeded!" he snarled at Drummond. The latter pulled the packet of papers from his pocket and passed them over without a word. The German ripped them open, scanned the contents with feverish eyes.

"Ah, this is it!" he roared. His face distorted with satanic glee. "This is the formula! With the figures I copied from your shoulder, *Herr* Drummond, the secret is complete! And so simple! I can prepare a trial quantity of *Drummondite* in my own laboratory in a short time! Guards! Lock these three prisoners in the basement!"

Soldiers released General Nash and Nevers from their chairs, and together with Drummond they were herded down into an evil-smelling concrete room beneath the house. Rats ran squealing at their approach, and behind them a barred door banged shut. The two guards seated themselves outside it.

"You had a hard decision to make, Captain Drummond," the Chief of Air said slowly. "But I think you took the right course."

"How about the men that stuff will kill?" Nevers cried hopelessly. "I'm not blaming you, Monk, but with that devil in control of *Drummondite* it means the end of the war!"

"We're not licked yet," the big man asserted grimly. "Someway we've got to get out of here!"

They had barely begun a cautious exploration of their prison when von Kransborg's grinning features appeared on the other side of the bars.

"I have news for you, Yankees. I have prepared a test quantity of *Drummondite*—it really is a very simple explosive to make, once the secret is known. And to you three go the honor of helping me with my first experiments!"

"Helping you?" Captain Nash de-

manded scornfully in a cold voice.

"Exactly," von Kransborg's guttural laughter echoed from the cold gray walls. "I wish to determine just how small an amount will be necessary to kill a man! Of course, it may prove to be a rather painful death for you, since the first charge may not kill! In which case I shall simply increase the amount until I know exactly how much is required to cause death!"

"You rotten murderer!" Monk rasped.

Even the calloused von Kransborg recoiled from the deadly hatred in Drummond's choked voice. Quickly he recovered his smooth manner.

"Murderer?" he asked. "Is the scientist a murderer when he experiments upon guinea pigs? That is what you are, gentlemen—human guinea pigs! It should be considered an honor, especially by you, Captain Drummond, to aid in the first test of your father's discovery! I have, on the field, two condemned Fokkers in which the test will be made. A small bomb filled with *Drummondite* will be placed under the seat in such a position that it cannot be disconnected by the pilot."

He laughed harshly as the three men stared at him.

CHAPTER FIVE

Drummond Pays a Debt

"ONE of you will be placed in each pit, and forced to take off. No one but myself will know exactly what moment the bomb is due to explode! For the last man, I shall have to devise something a bit different. It should afford a show well worth seeing—one my men will enjoy. So, until the final preparations are made, I'll leave you to decide who will be first!" He turned on his heel and left.

The three prisoners stared at each other in hopeless dismay, then Drummond lunged to his feet. "Come on!" he whispered. "Let's finish looking this place

over. And listen for the guard; don't let him get wise."

For a half hour the three examined every square inch of the room, only to give up in despair. The walls were of solid concrete. The single window, even if it hadn't been barred, was too small to permit escape. The door of heavy oak was padlocked, and two armed guards sat just outside. Nevers and General Nash dropped heavily to the floor, and Drummond followed suit. His hand, rubbing the cold earth absently, struck a tiny obstruction. He felt of it idly, then suddenly rose to his knees and began a frenzied digging. Attracted by the prolonged silence, a guard glanced in the door and Drummond froze. The next moment he resumed his work. By now Nevers and the Chief were beside him, watching excitedly. They saw that Drummond had unearthed a heavy iron ring which had been inbedded in the packed earthen floor. The big man braced himself and heaved with all his great strength. Abruptly a square section of the floor rose, disclosing a few stone steps leading down into blackness.

Nevers peered down. "There's a tunnel of some kind!" he whispered, hope growing in his voice.

Drummond nodded. "Yeah, here's something the Huns themselves didn't know about. This house was built by a Frenchman; it must be a couple of hundred years old. It paid to have a private exit in those days!"

"Let's get out of here," the Chief snapped. "You first, Drummond!"

The giant shook his head. "I don't doubt but that this tunnel comes out somewhere nearby. But you and Nevers are the ones who are going! I'm staying here!"

"Don't be a fool, Monk!" Nevers hissed. "What good will that do?"

"Listen," Drummond said harshly, "all of us can't make it. Notice how that guard looks in every time we stop talking? They'd be after us in no time. Anyway,

that tunnel's probably too small for me. You guys go ahead. I'll fake a conversation here, to keep the sentries satisfied. Those two Fokkers von Kransborg mentioned—if you can get to 'em before he installs the explosive you can maybe get away. If you do, bring a squadron of bombers back here and blow this place to hell!"

In vain the two argued with him. Drummond was grimly determined. "Anyway, I'm not leaving here until I get a crack at von Kransborg! Better for you two to get free than for none of us. Now get going—or by God, I'll knock you cold and shove you in that hole!"

"You're a real man, Captain," Nash said, thrusting out his hand. "If I get back I'll see that you're squared all around. I'm proud to have had you in my command!"

"So long," Nevers added. "I still think you're crazy as hell—but you've got out of worse jams than this. If I can leave a gun or anything handy for you on the way, you bet I'll do it!"

Drummond helped them into the tunnel, then closed the trap carefully. All at once he felt overwhelmed with loneliness. But, as he had promised, he kept up a steady stream of talk. He had a knack for imitation, and his attempts at mimicking his companions' voices were good enough to satisfy the guards.

Fifteen minutes had passed before a sudden uproar broke loose on the field. Dimly he heard snatches of bawled orders and oaths, interspersed with gunfire. In the midst of the commotion came the unmistakable blare of Mercedes motors. The roar rose to a high pitch, then gradually faded into the distance. Drummond heaved a great sigh of thanksgiving. Nevers and the Chief had made it!

Almost immediately afterwards his cell door was unlocked and three Boche troopers advanced on him menacingly. Prodded brutally by their bayonets, Drummond was shoved up the stairs and

again into the room in which he had first met von Kransborg.

The German was waiting, his evil face mottled by murderous fury. Animal sounds rattled in his throat as he stepped close to the American and struck him savagely in the face.

"Your *schwein* friends have escaped, as you must know!" von Kransborg spat. "Well, *mein freund*, that makes your finish just that much more unpleasant! They really did not matter; it is you I am interested in. I swore that I would exterminate the Drummond family, and I shall make that oath good right now!"

He motioned to the guards, and they shoved Drummond against the wall. At his feet a dark blot was a mute reminder of the fate met in that spot by the German flyer earlier in the night. Drummond stood motionless, knowing that the slightest movement would draw a pointblank volley.

"I shall use a more certain method of execution for you that I had planned for the experiment," the German mouthed savagely. "I shall kill you as I killed so many of your squadron mates!"

He had retreated now into the semi-gloom of a doorway. Drummond caught a gleam of metal, then the guards stepped hastily aside. Instantly something struck sharply against Drummond's stomach. The hidden steel corselet turned the missile; it fell to the floor. Instinctively Drummond bent over, snatched the object up. He had only time to see that it was a short, hollow steel dart of some sort. Then he flung it squarely at the dumfounded guards!

A small explosion followed instantly. A soldier shrieked in agony, waving the dripping stump of an arm. A second guard fell, hands pressed to what had been a face. Drummond heard a startled yell from von Kransborg, and a second missile caromed from the American's shoulder. Before he heard the explosion he was racing toward the stairway.

All avenues of escape save toward the upper floor were cut off. As he reached the first landing Drummond almost collided with von Kransborg. The Hun held a pistol in his hand, and he fired one wild shot. Then, loose lips twitching in anticipation, the Hun lunged at Drummond, arms extended.

The Yank slid inside those terrible gorilla arms, fists working like pistons. Three lightning, crushing blows smashed into the killer's ape face powerful enough to have broken an ordinary man's neck; the German only cursed and blinked.

Several men were charging up the stairway, and Drummond saw in a flash that he had no time to batter the Hun down. He stooped, wrapped both brawny arms about von Kransborg's body. Then he lifted the Hun high overhead and flung him at the rushing soldiers. The mass of men went tumbling back, a tangle of threshing bodies. Drummond dashed up the remaining steps three at a time. If he could only reach the roof—! A square opening in the ceiling of the first room he came to caught his eye. From a chair, he leaped, caught his fingers over the edge of the skylight. In another moment he had drawn himself to the sloping roof.

Crouching, he ran lightly across the roof toward the north end. He saw von Kransborg stagger out on the field, a grotesque figure in the first gray light of dawn. Running men scurried through the fog and shots rattled out **aimlessly**. Drummond reached the edge of the roof, measured the distance to **the nearest tree limb** with a single glance, then leaped.

His big hands caught and held, and he swung swiftly toward the ground. His desperate gaze was fixed on a Fokker in the last of a row of ships, perhaps fifty yards away from him.

WITHOUT a second's hesitation he raced heavily toward the plane. He reached it unseen, and as a mechanic

dropped down from the wing Drummond's hands clamped on the man's throat. That first convulsive grip almost snapped the fellow's neck.

"Spin that prop!" the Yank roared. The mech gasped breath into his burning lungs and stumbled to obey, too filled with the terror of his close escape to notice that Drummond's hands held no weapon. But as the Mercedes crackled into life, running men converged on the crate. Drummond saw von Kransborg crawl agilely into the pit of a Fokker further down the line, which was already warm.

The Fokker jerked forward as Drummond smacked the throttle, and for one second he was sure the cold motor was going to stall. But after a few gasps it settled into a rhythmic roar. The ship shot into the air scant seconds ahead of von Kransborg's pursuing Fokker, and at that second Drummond felt his blood freeze in his veins. The ship he flew carried Spandaus—but there were no belts in the guns!

In frenzied haste he fumbled about the pit, hoping to find at least one belt of ammo. A short distance back, von Kransborg was closing in swiftly, his warmer motor easily closing the gap. Then Drummond's groping hand struck a cold, metal object jammed down beside the seat. He lifted it into view, and in that second the mystery of the horror killings on the dromes of the 33rd and 36th was clear to him.

When he had been struck by the dart before making his escape, the thing had been partially explained. He knew then that in some way those short, hollow steel darts had been fired into the victim's bodies, after which the explosive in the tip detonated, ripping the body to tatters from *within!* Now, even though death in the form of the charging Fokker was very close, Drummond's brain explained the rest.

The object in his hands resembled a machine gun, with the exception that it was obviously fired by pressure from the compressed air cylinder which was attached to it. In reality it was a lighter, more compact model of the harpoon guns used by modern whalers to fire explosive charges into their huge quarry. No wonder the murders had been so silent! Drummond could visualize two or three marksmen being dropped into American territory with these deadly weapons. Simple enough, then, for them to hide in or behind the trees about the air fields. And picking off their bewildered victims had been as coldbloodedly easy as shooting fish in a pail!

Cold, fighting fury flooded Drummond's brain as the details of von Kransborg's vicious murder scheme became plain to him. But now his thoughts were interrupted.

Tac-tac-tac-tac!

Lead whined past his head and slammed into the wings and fuselage. Drummond rolled aside as the Hun charged in furiously, and his flying fingers worked at the strange weapon in desperate haste. It was similar enough to a machine gun in principle so that the Yank quickly solved its operation. With the bizarre weapon ready, Drummond jockeyed for position.

Seconds seemed like hours as the two ships whirled and dodged. Spandau tracer wove a tangled web of death about Drummond's Fokker. Evidently von Kransborg knew the ship to be unarmed—but was ignorant of the harpoon gun it contained!

Confident in his belief that Drummond was only flying in terror, watching for a chance to escape, von Kransborg grew careless. Suddenly Drummond saw his chance. Von Kransborg went into a turn with his wings too flat. A vagrant gust of wind keeled the Hun's Fokker into a skid. Instantly, Drummond dove past. Holding the stick between his knees, he

lifted the heavy harpoon gun like a child's toy. His eye glanced down the sights, centered on the form in the other cockpit. Then Drummond's finger pressed the trigger.

A faint hiss followed, unheard in the bellow of motors. Abruptly, von Kransborg's huge body jerked half out of the cockpit. He turned a stricken face back at the American, his eyes bulging with terrorized agony. Drummond waited that split-second, with no remorse or pity in his heart.

A horrible muffled explosion puffed out. Black smoke jetted from the Hun's mouth and nostrils, instantly followed by a flood of crimson. The Fokker quivered, then dove like an arrow toward the gray, dawn-lighted field. Down, down—then into the ground with a shattering roar. Then only a splash of blazing fragments remained of the staffel leader and his craft.

Drummond banked swiftly, the harpoon gun again reloaded. As pilots on the field below jerked out of their dismayed paralysis, the Fokker slammed past the small building used as a laboratory by von Kransborg. Drummond rose in his seat, a wild, gigantic figure of vengeance. A second lethal dart whirred from the harpoon rifle, squarely through one of the laboratory windows.

The entire building seemed to rise bod-

ily into the air, and a stunning explosion rocked Drummond's ship wildly. A hail of dirt, stone and debris settled back toward the earth.

"And that's the end of *Drummondite!*" the Yank muttered grimly. "Von Kransborg, I reckon all accounts are settled now!"

Even as the thought crossed his mind, the very heavens overhead seemed to erupt cocarded Spads. In the lead, two decrepit Fokkers, seemingly piloted by madmen, fell upon von Kransborg's flyers like the wings of doom!

"Blacky Nevers!" Drummond roared. "The Chief!"

Five minutes later von Kransborg's crack staffel was only a hateful memory. Hangars, barracks—everything—was in smoking ruins. The broad field was dotted with crushed and broken winged shapes that had shortly before been swift instruments of death. Then, flying wearily home, with the Spads acting as a guard of honor to the three battered Fokkers, Drummond felt that his father and the men of the 33rd and 36th had been well avenged. Von Kransborg's lust for power had led him to the inevitable end.

Drummond, thinking of the instruction duty that was now forever behind him, grinned happily into the rising light of dawn.

THE END

A CLUE

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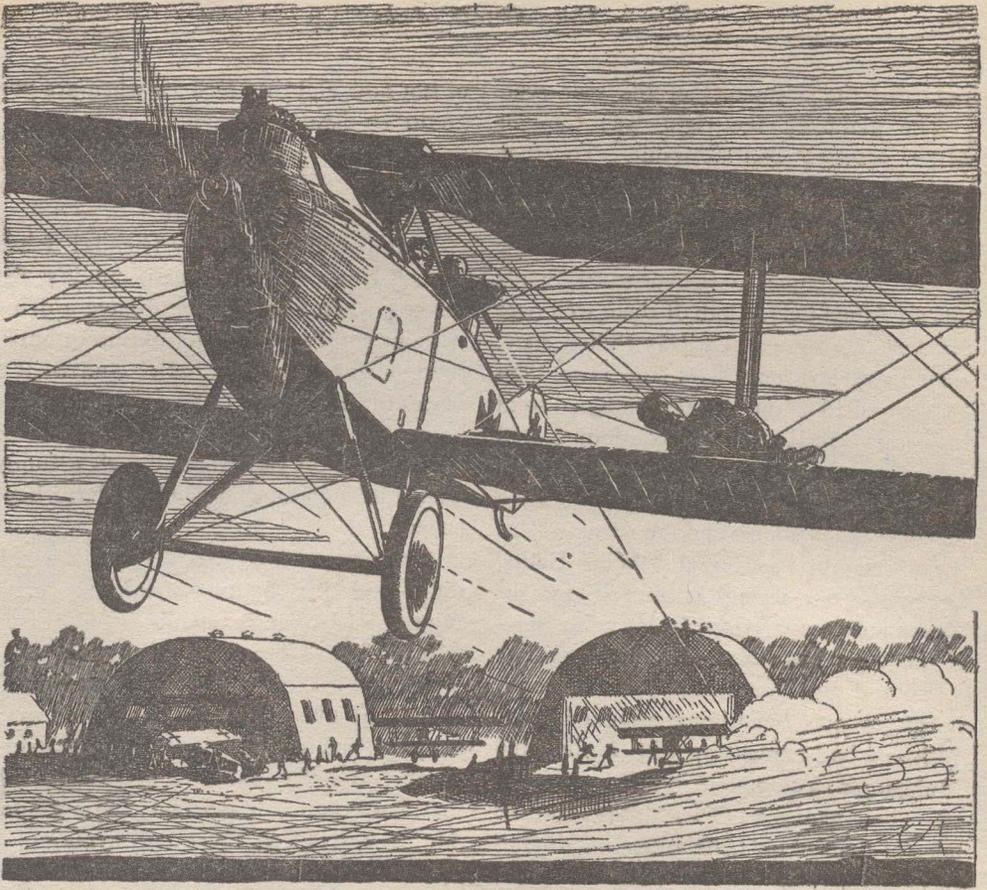
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The Sky Busters

by WILLIAM HARTLEY

They went roaring down the field.

They're loose again—those bouncing screwballs of the Sky—Molloy and McNamara with a flying job to do. But you'll find these lads much better with their fists than they are between the ears, as they take over G-2's duty and wind up behind the eight ball!

THE three big men slumped in the tonneau of the open Cadillac and regarded each other breathlessly. Their faces showed some slight signs of wear and tear, indications of recent conflict, and each pair of ham-like hands bore out the testimony of the misused features. The knuckles were skinned and swollen, and silently attested to the fact that faces other than their own had suffered considerable damage.

The car, driven by a small, stocky man whose face was split in a wide grin, was hurtling through the outskirts of Paris as fast as the powerful motor would push it. The driver looked in the small mirror and

regarded the occupants of the rear seat.

The giant on the right was Captain Mike Molloy, 24th Pursuit. Together with the man wedged in the middle, Captain Tommy McNamara, he formed the fightingest, flyingest pair of madmen ever to whip a couple of half-warmed Spads off an Allied field. Both of them well over six feet, beamy and hard as chilled steel, they'd wrecked more bars, and jaws, than they cared to count. Their combined total of victories in the air was astounding, and flying together or singly, they were the bane of the German Air Force.

Their companion was almost as tall as they, and just as broad. 'Wild Eddie' Breadon was a legend in himself, and his reputation compared favorably with those of the other two men. He could fly like a fool and fight like a fiend, and a month before, when he had been assigned to the 24th and had teamed up with Molloy and McNamara, a terrible trio had been welded. Their names were legendary, and the tales of their exploits fabulous but founded on pure fact.

And now they regarded each other silently, gulping great draughts of air into their lungs. Finally, McNamara gasped, "And where the hell did you come from, Tim?"

The driver half-turned and spoke out of the corner of his mouth. Sergeant Tim Murphy was the chief mechanic at the field of the 24th, and he tended the planes of the three men as carefully as a hen guards her chicks.

"I had just driven Colonel Cummings into Headquarters, from the field. I was passing the club when you came out so—fast."

"Fast is right," Molloy said. "I've seldom been in such a hell of a hurry. McNamara, why can't you keep your nose out of trouble?"

McNamara snorted. "Hell's bells and gingerbread! Things are gettin' so that a man can't go out and grab himself a bit

of fun now and then! Since when are you gettin' so damned virtuous?"

"He's not getting virtuous," Breadon explained. "He's getting old. The guy doesn't like to go any more."

Molloy said, "Nuts, my friends! I had a good time, while it lasted, but it's disturbing when I can't sit and have a drink without you two gents gettin' into a brawl the moment I turn my back. And what a place to pick—the Officers' Club! We have a fat chance of gettin' back in there again! If only you weren't such a funny man. McNamara, this wouldn't have happened."

McNamara shrugged. "What the hell did I do? Just because those guys can't take a joke once in awhile is no reason why I shouldn't have a good time."

"A joke! First you snap the bottom off a cocktail glass and use the thing as a monocle, calling all those English flyers 'Bertie' and 'Eggy'. You get away with that, but you're not satisfied. Oh, no—not McNamara! You must trip a major—a *major*—as he's passing the table. When the guy falls on his puss, you remark in a very loud voice what an awful thing it is when the higher officers get so stewed they can't stand—what a poor example they're setting for the men."

"And then the fun started," Breadon observed.

"Yeah," Molloy continued, "A couple of British officers come over and object to your horseplay, and you tell them to mind their own business."

"Well, you seemed to enjoy yourself, once the trouble started," McNamara countered.

"What could I do, stand there and see you get murdered?"

"Well, it wasn't a bad brawl," Breadon put in. "There sure were a hell of a lot of those guys, though. There wasn't another Yank in the joint."

Molloy grinned. "Boy, it was a damn good thing that window was handy. When

those M.P.'s came in, I thought we were slated for a trip to the jug."

"You think anyone knew us?" Breadon wanted to know.

"Not a chance," McNamara assured him. "I never saw any of the gents before, and we'll steer clear of them in the future."

They drove on for more than an hour, and as they neared the field of the 24th, McNamara suddenly came erect in the seat and pointed up and over to the right.

"What the hell is that guy doing over here?" he shouted, and the three other men followed his finger.

High over head, and flying for the field of the 24th, was a coal-black Fokker. Its flight was erratic and wobbly, as if a green hand were at the stick. The wings dipped and wavered, and the nose of the ship dropped suddenly, then came back on an even keel.

"I can't figure that one out," Molloy said, squinting at the plane. "The guy is either drunk or it's his first solo. And I don't think the Huns are training their men on *this* side of the lines."

Breadon said to Murphy, "Hurry up, Tim, and we'll be on hand when this monkey gets over the field."

The car jerked ahead, and Molloy asked, of no one in particular, "Do you think the gent is going to land?"

"It looks that way," McNamara answered. "He's heading lower all the time. I wouldn't like to be in that job when it hits the ground. That johnny doesn't look like any Rickenbacker to me. He'll pile up sure as hell if he tries to set that thing down."

They reached the edge of the field just as the German plane came in for a landing. They noticed that the ground gun crews were in place in the pits, but were holding their fire. They saw Major Bowers, C.O. of the squadron, standing at the corner of one of the hangars.

Sergeant Murphy braked the car to a

slewing halt, and they all piled out and ran for the spot where they judged that the plane would hit.

THE Fokker picked up speed as it neared the ground, and at the last moment the nose went kiting up in the air and the tail skid hit with a crash. One wing slammed down and crumpled, pulling the ship in a crazy half circle. The motor bit into the ground and the fuselage whipped over and slammed viciously into the tarmac.

They were the first to reach the wreck, and together they fought to extricate the pilot before the tank blew. The pit was a twisted mass of wood and rags, but Molloy finally found an arm and a leg and began hauling. The limp, inert body came easily, and they had just carried the pilot to a safe distance when the gas tank went up with a flat, ominous *poof!*

They laid the man on the ground just as a crowd ran up from the hangars and gun pits. He was dressed in a German uniform, and the entire left side of the jacket was stained a dull, wet red.

"Some gent who found himself a scrap, got hit, and came down on the nearest field. Couldn't make it home," Molloy guessed.

The man's eyes opened slowly, and his lips moved in an effort at speech. Bowers had reached the group, now, and they bent closer to catch what the fellow was saying.

"Name is . . . Gowan," he muttered. "From . . . G-2. Just escaped from . . . Mannhiem's field . . . near Gravelotte. Rogers is prisoner. He has all . . . information."

The lips ceased to move, and the man's body went suddenly limp. Molloy, who had been holding his head, said, "And that's all, Major. The guy is all through."

Bowers shook his head.

"I'd like to know what he was talking about. I'll have to call G-2 and see what

that crowd knows about this affair."

He detailed three of the men to remove the body, then hurried over to the Operations shack.

Molloy arose from his position beside the dead man, and he and McNamara and Breadon walked over to the bar. Over a couple of drinks, Breadon asked, "What do you think the trouble was?"

McNamara shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine, Eddie. It seems to me that this gent, and the guy he called 'Rogers', were doing a job for G-2 and got nabbed. *This* gent made a break, stopped a couple of slugs, and the other guy is still in the gow."

"We'll know more about it when the Major gets in touch with Intelligence," Molloy said. "Maybe he'll give us the low-down."

"Well," Breadon said, "it won't mean anything to us. If it's a G-2 case, those birds will take care of it themselves. They're a clever crowd."

McNamara snorted. "Clever, hell! That bunch is the greatest load of hot air in the world. They sit on their fannies, playing with a few codes that a kid could work out, and call themselves brainy. Why, I could do that sort of work in a walk. They don't fly and they don't fight. I'll bet they just sit around the office playing checkers."

Molloy took a drink and agreed. "You're right, Tommy. Just what the hell did they ever do? They had a reputation handed to them, and that's all they've got. A pile of windy kiwis with no more brains than it takes to come in out of the rain. A very sloppy outfit."

Breadon shook his head. "I think you guys are all wrong. Those johnnies must have what it takes to get into that part of the game. They're not picking any dim-wits to handle that job. Those guys have got plenty of stuff under their hats."

"Yeah," Molloy snorted, "hair! None of those gents are supermen, Eddie. Why,

you or I or Mac could take hold of any of their problems and do just as well as the best of them. You don't have to be any genius to discover that two and two make four. And that's all they do; put a few facts together and get an answer."

"I'd like to try a little of that work," McNamara said dreamily, staring off into space. "I'd like to get a crack at it, just to show those johnnies up. Hell, you'd think they had a patent on brains! It's simple stuff."

Their conversation was interrupted by the entrance into the *estaminet* of Major Bowers. The C.O. had a worried frown on his face, and his eyes wandered around the room until they came to rest on the trio at the bar. He hurried over to them.

"Well, Major," Molloy asked, "what's the news? You seem to have something on your mind."

"Come over to a table and sit down," Bowers said. "I want to talk to you fellows about something."

The four men drew chairs to a table in the corner of the room, and Bowers began to speak.

"That man who landed here was one of G-2's ace operatives. Two weeks ago, he and this other fellow of whom he spoke, Rogers, were sent on a tough job. Germany's been moving a hell of a lot of troops up to the line, recently, and Headquarters wanted to know whether they were well stocked and had plenty of men, or if this was to be the one last big effort. Gowan and Rogers were to get over, secure as much information as they could in two weeks, then get back—maybe.

"Well, from G-2's story, and from what Gowan said, you have a pretty complete picture. They apparently found out all they wanted to know and started back. From what he mentioned about Mannheim's field, it's my guess that they tried to steal a ship and were caught."

"What are they going to do about the

other fellow?" Molloy wanted to know.

"I'm not sure," Bowers said. "If, as Gowan said, Rogers has all this information that they wanted, he's a pretty valuable man. I imagine that G-2 will probably try to get him out of that joint."

"It'll be a hell of a job," Breadon grumbled. "And besides, if he was in a German uniform, like this other guy, he won't keep long. They'll take him out and stand him against a wall."

"That's what they said at G-2," Bowers agreed. "Any effort to release the man will have to be made tonight. Tomorrow will be too late."

McNamara leaned across the table. "Listen, Major. Do you think that we might make a try—"

Bowers cut him off. "None of that stuff, Mac! You men are too damn valuable to go barging off, trying to get that bird. This is G-2's job. We'll let them attend to it. They're probably better equipped to fool around with a situation like this, anyhow. I'll bet they have some of their agents on the other side working on the case already. No, Mac, I don't want you or Molloy or Breadon to get mixed up in this thing at all."

"But, Major," Molloy said, "we could go over tonight and—"

Bowers rose from the table and waved his hand in a gesture of finality. "Nothing doing, boys. I don't want you to meddle with this thing, and those are orders. I just thought you might be interested in hearing about the case. Don't get foolish and tamper with this mess, now."

AS HE left the *estaminet*, Molloy ordered another round, and the three heads met in the center of the table.

"What do you say we give it a try?" Breadon suggested.

Molloy answered swiftly, "Sure, it'll be a cinch! There'll be a moon tonight, and we could go over there, land near the field, then spring this guy before the

Jerries knew what was in the wind."

"Okay," Breadon said. "Where can we get a map? Let's get started on this thing."

McNamara had been silent, but now he caught Molloy's eye and winked swiftly.

"I think you guys have the wrong idea," he said slowly. "Five minutes ago the Major was sitting right here telling us not to touch this job. The moment he goes out the door, you start making plans. Where's your sense of honor and decency? Haven't you any respect for authority?"

Breadon looked at him in astonishment, and Molloy pretended surprise.

"Just what the hell is the matter with you?" Breadon wanted to know. "I never heard you say anything like that before. Don't you feel well? 'Sense of honor—respect for authority!' You have about as much affection for authority as I have for rattlesnakes!"

Molloy said, somewhat weakly, "Yeah, why the sudden change in complexion? What's bitten you now?"

McNamara waved their protests aside. "Nothing's bitten me. I just have a stronger sense of responsibility than before. I'm convinced that we've always had the wrong idea—barging around and doing whatever we pleased. We've got to look at things from another angle. We ought to consider the major, for instance. Here he's good enough to come in and tell us all about this thing, then, when we suggest going after this gent, he says nothing doing. All right, let it go at that. The man wasn't talking just to hear himself."

"I think you're whacky," Breadon grumbled.

"It's just that I'm beginning to come to my senses," McNamara answered. "This free-and-easy policy we've been pursuing is the wrong dope. We'll have to fall in line and do as we're told. Let's be soldiers, not screwballs."

Breadon shook his head. "I never thought I'd live to see the day when *you'd* give me that line of talk. Things are coming to a pretty pass when Tommy McNamara goes reformist and starts preaching about duty, and falling in line."

Molloy said, "After all Eddie, there is something in what he says. If we'd behaved ourselves all along, you know damn well that the three of us would be commanding squadrons, at least. We've been in so much hot water that I was thinking about taking up plumbing. Let's turn over a new leaf. And let's start now. Forget about this thing and have another drink."

"No," Breadon said, "I don't want any more. Here we have an opportunity to grab ourselves a lot of fun, and you turn it down. I don't know what's come over you."

Shaking his head sadly, he wandered from the room.

As soon as he had gone, Molloy turned to McNamara.

"All right, Mr. Brains, what was the big idea? I got the high sign, but why the sudden reversal of form? Don't you want to tackle this?"

"Certainly, chump, but I didn't want Eddie in on it."

"Why, what's wrong with the guy? He's seen a lot of trouble with us. He's a handy gent to have around."

"Sure, sure. But I want to teach him a lesson."

"What do you mean?"

"You heard the way he was going on about those G-2 guys, didn't you? He thinks they're a flock of whirlwinds. Well, we'll show him that we can pull this job without any help—either from him or from G-2. Besides, what the hell do you think this is, an outing? Two of us might be able to get there, pick the guy up and take a powder—but three would be too many. Too many cooks—"

"Maybe you're right. But what about the Major? He sounded as if he meant

that 'hands off' business, awhile ago."

McNamara gave a short laugh. "Sure he meant it. But if we bring back the bacon, he'll be tickled to death. Imagine dragging this Rogers guy home and giving those smart gents the horselaugh! It's worth any trouble that we might have."

"Okay, okay! What's the dope?"

"Let's go over to the Nissen. I've got a couple of maps, and we can look the situation over."

They ambled over to the Nissen they shared, and McNamara pulled open a trunk. He dug out a couple of maps, and they studied them. Molloy suddenly said:

"Holy smoke! I know that joint like I know the way to bed. I used to fly patrols over there when I was with the French."

"Any place we can land, near Mannhiem's field?"

"Sure. There's a pasture, off to the north there," he pointed to a spot on the map, "and it's only about half a mile from the field. This'll be a cinch."

"You're sure you can find it at night?"

"Certainly. There'll be a moon up, and besides, I told you that I know the layout."

McNamara nodded. "Yeah, but I seem to remember hearing that story before. I'd like a little more assurance than just your say-so."

Molloy stood up. His manner had changed.

"Are you calling me a liar, McNamara?"

McNamara waved him down.

"Sit down, sit down! Don't start getting huffy with me, just because I'm being careful of my hide. I'll take your word for it. You know all about Gravelotte, and you have a field all picked out. Okay. I hope you know what you're talking about."

Molloy sat down again. "Don't worry

about it. Just leave the whole thing to me. What'll we take, a two-seater?"

"I don't think so," McNamara said. "We'd be better off with a couple of Spads. Even if we get in trouble and lose one of the ships we can always tie this Rogers on a wing, if he's hurt, and one of us can take him home. The other one will have to hustle for himself. If we take one big ship, and anything happens to it, we'll be up the creek."

"Sounds good to me. I'll go over and see Tim Murphy and tell him to have the ships ready tonight about eleven, okay?"

"Yeah, and ask him to keep his trap shut, or we'll get in trouble. Once we get back, tell him we'll square him with the major."

A BIT after eleven that night, the silence was suddenly shattered as the two big Hissos roared into life. The engines had been warmed in the evening, and within a minute they were both singing a steady, regular song. Molloy and McNamara taxied them away from No. 2 hangar, rolled them down the field, then lifted them swiftly into the sky.

The moon was not yet up, and with Molloy in the lead, they flew a compass course for Gravelotte. They went up to ten thousand, and McNamara kept Molloy's glowing exhaust stacks right in front of him. The big lights searched for them as they went over the lines, but they bored on, contemptuous of the German archie fire that belched up at them.

They figured Gravelotte was three-quarter's of an hour's flight, and they flew steadily on, never deviating from their course. Once McNamara thought he glimpsed a flight of German ships, but they lost them in the dark.

The moon appeared suddenly, when they were about halfway on their trip. It came out from behind some clouds, low down on the horizon, and lighted the upper sky. But it left the ground in shadow.

McNamara consulted his watch and the map on his knees, and decided that they had almost reached their destination. They had agreed to cut the motors when they neared Gravelotte, and glide down to the pasture of which Molloy had spoken. McNamara glanced up ahead, and he saw that Molloy had just cut the switch and was starting down in a long, flat glide.

He followed suit and clung to the other's tail, and down the sky they swept like two great silent birds.

They had gone to five thousand when McNamara had a strange and sudden premonition that all was not right in their little world. He stretched overside and strained his eyes in an effort to see the ground, but the moon was still low, and the earth was a great black blanket.

He tried to fight off the eerie feeling, but it would not be dismissed. Again looking below, and once more seeing absolutely nothing, he mouthed a curse and tilted the nose of the plane at a steeper angle.

The Spad dropped like a stone, and he drew level with Molloy's ship, then took a slight lead. He pulled her up into level flight again and waved to the figure in the other pit. His gesture was unmistakable. In it there was questioning, doubt, and a suggestion to turn back.

He knew that Molloy had seen him when the other pilot waved aside his protests. Molloy's eloquent hands said, "Get out of the way, lunkhead. This is the field I told you about, and there's nothing wrong. We're going right on down."

McNamara swore a blue streak.

"All right, hammerhead," he muttered. "You know it all! This is the joint, and everything is quiet along the Potomac! You'd better be right, Mike, but I don't think you are."

Molloy once again took the lead, and they descended more swiftly. The strange sense of danger stayed with McNamara, and he cursed himself for a fool.

"What the hell's the matter with me?"

I'm as jittery as an old lady! Mike must know where he's going and what the set-up's like."

They were down to a thousand, now, and the dim outline of the earth was becoming more distinct. McNamara made out a row of tall trees that lined the field below them, which was merely a lighter shadow than the surrounding country.

Molloy went to one end of the pasture and came in fast. McNamara was right at his heels as he set the Spad on the ground.

The ships rolled to a halt near the trees, and both men climbed from the pits. Molloy walked over to McNamara and whispered.

"What the hell was the matter with you up there? Didn't you think I knew what I was doing?"

"I still have a funny feeling that everything isn't just what the doctor ordered," McNamara said. "Something tells me that we made a mistake, somewhere along the line. Are you sure that this is the dump you had in mind?"

Molloy snorted derisively. "I don't know what the hell's come over you, Mac. You're gettin' super-cautious, all of a sudden. Certainly, I know that this is the field! I brought you right here on the button, didn't I? We didn't get lost or anything, did we?"

"No," McNamara answered, "we didn't get lost or anything—I hope!"

"Stop tossing that wet blanket around," Molloy told him. "We've got to get going, if we want to spring that Rogers gent. Now as I remember, there was a road—"

Suddenly, the night became day. Molloy and McNamara had walked away from the planes, towards the edge of the woods, and now their eyes were blinded by the brilliance of the great arc lights that came to life.

The whole field was illuminated, and as they recovered their vision, they could see

that they were in no pasture. They were on a fully equipped flying field of no mean size. The field was lined with trees, but nestling under the trees were low, compact hangars and quarters for the personnel.

They turned back to the ships, but between them and the planes was a squad of German soldiers with rifles at the ready. Out from under the trees before them stepped another gang, and McNamara turned to Molloy.

"WELL, you certainly know your way around, Mike. I couldn't have done any better myself. 'Right on the nose', I think you said. Right smack on Mannhiem's field! Boy, you can call your shots."

"Now, wait a minute," Molloy protested. "There must have been something wrong, somewhere!"

"Yeah," McNamara snarled. "Right where you hang your hat! There's always been something wrong there, but I'm the only guy who knows it. What a smart gent you are! Why, hell, you knew the way here like you know the way to bed! You mustn't be particular where you sleep, you dummy!"

The soldiers advanced on them, and seeing that the situation was hopeless, they made no objection when one of the men stepped forward and relieved them of their guns.

"And now what happens?" McNamara wanted to know. "Where do we go from here, Mike, if you're so damned bright? Give me all the dope."

"I'll tell you where *you* can go!" Molloy snarled. "Just because a guy makes a slight mistake, you go all up in the air."

"A slight mistake! I'd hate like hell to be around when you pulled a real boner! Come on, master mind, what's the next move?"

A voice addressed them from the outside of the circle.

"The next move, gentlemen, is in the direction of the jug."

They looked up and saw a tall young officer in spotless boots and immaculate uniform approaching them. He stood before them and bowed.

"*Kapitan* Henrick Mannhiem, gentlemen, at your service."

McNamara nodded. "Hello, son. This is a nice joint you have here. One of the nicest fields I've been on in a long time."

The German smiled. "I see. Just on a tour of inspection, eh?"

"Yeah," McNamara replied, "we were going down the line a bit, but Molloy here said 'No,' he'd have to stop down here and see how things were getting along."

At the name 'Molloy', Mannhiem's expression changed. He glanced quickly at them both, then turned to McNamara.

"If he is Molloy," he said, "then you must be McNamara—right?"

McNamara nodded. "You're right, pal. I'm McNamara and this is Chowderhead Molloy, the pride of the 24th. He couldn't think his way out of a revolving door."

"Never mind that stuff, McNamara," Molloy snarled. "I've taken about all of your lip that I'm going to. I'll ram a few teeth down your throat if you don't keep that trap of yours closed."

"Why, you dumb donkey—" McNamara said, and started forward. But Mannhiem stepped between them, a broad smile on his face.

"Gentlemen, I'm sure you have trouble enough already. We're honored to have the great McNamara and Molloy pay us a visit—which, I am sorry to say, will be more or less permanent—and we certainly do not want you to make things more difficult."

He spoke to four of the soldiers in German, and the men stepped forward.

"It's very late, and I know you gentlemen would like to be shown to your

quarters. These men will escort you. In the morning we will talk again, eh?"

He smiled and bowed again, then turned on his heel and strode away. One of the soldiers guarding them motioned with his gun, and with their 'escort', they walked to a small building about a hundred yards away.

"Some service," Molloy said. "I hope they give us a nice, airy room with a southern exposure."

"They ought to give you a room with nice, padded walls," McNamara told him. Molloy turned, and McNamara said, "All right, all right! I'll lay off. We might as well make the best of things."

They entered the building and saw that it had but a single room, which was clean and cool. Two cots were arranged near one wall, and a small table was the only other piece of furniture.

"Not bad," Molloy observed. "I've paid for rooms that were a hell of a lot worse."

McNamara shrugged. "It'll have to do until morning, anyway. I'm much too tired to go looking around for another place."

The guards walked out and locked the door. The two Americans looked about and saw that the room had two high windows, and both were heavily barred. The door was staunch and strong, and there seemed to be no possible means of escape. They sat on the beds.

"Well," Molloy asked, "what next? Where do we go from here?"

"If we don't think of something damn soon," McNamara said, "from here we go to some smelly, lousy concentration camp in the back areas someplace."

"I wonder how our friend Rogers is making out?"

"I'd almost forgotten about him," McNamara confessed. "We come over here to rescue Rogers—now who the hell is going to get us out?"

"There must be another cell around here someplace," Molloy said. "I guess

they take particular care of him. But we'll find a way out of here, and when we go, we'll take him with us."

"Well, we better get going in a hurry. I don't imagine they'll waste much time with him."

"Well, we certainly won't do anything tonight. We don't know where the hell he is, or how we're going to get out. We'd better let things ride until the morning."

"If we don't wake up early enough," McNamara stated, "there won't be any Rogers. So let's hit the hay."

Molloy started to take off his flying suit. "You know, I'm hungry as hell. I wish we had something to eat."

As if in answer to his words, a guard opened the door and another man entered the room. He was carrying a large tray, and Molloy and McNamara saw that it was loaded with sandwiches and a half-dozen bottles of beer. The man smiled, and in a very heavy accent said,

"*Kapitan* Mannhiem's compliments."

The two Yanks advanced, huge smiles on their faces.

"Molloy," McNamara said, "that wasn't such a hell of a bad mistake you made, after all."

THEY both woke at dawn the next morning and stood on their beds and peered through one of the windows, then the other. They saw the field in detail, now, and they were amazed at the size of the place. There were ten hangars, and they counted fourteen buildings which apparently were used as living quarters. There was one small structure near them which attracted their attention. They noticed that the door was massive and strongly bolted, and that there were bars on the two windows which they could see.

"I'll bet that's where the G-2 johnny is," McNamara said. "It's a lot like this place, and I guess they keep him off by himself."

"What are we going to do about it?" Molloy wanted to know.

"Your guess is as good as mine. Nobody seems to be paying particular attention to the shack. Maybe they're not going to shoot him for awhile yet."

They watched the other shack all morning, but no one went near it. A guard brought them a big breakfast, and at noon Mannhiem came in to see them. He seemed to be in a hurry, and although he was civil and even polite, he didn't stay long.

"You will be here for a few days," he said, "until we can arrange to have you sent back to a camp. In the meantime, ask for anything you want, within reason, and we'll try to get it for you. It isn't often that we have such distinguished guests."

When he had gone, Molloy said to McNamara, "You know; they're nice to us here, Tommy, and that's how we're going to get out."

McNamara said, "What are you doing, giving me double talk? What are you driving at?"

"Here's what I mean. Did you notice that when they bring our meals, one guy stands at the door and the other one brings in the tray? They're all smiles and very chummy indeed. Well, tonight, when they bring some food, you start talking to the guy at the door while I amble over and look at the food as the gent sets down the tray. When I give the word, we'll jump them both. Sound good to you?"

"It's all right," McNamara said. "What the hell, we'll give it a try, anyhow. What do we lose?"

And they waited impatiently for that time when the two guards would appear with their evening meal. The afternoon wore on slowly and though they watched the neighboring building which they took to be another guardhouse, no activity was apparent.

It must have been five o'clock when Molloy, who was standing on the bed, taking his turn at observing the other

house, called excitedly to McNamara; "Hey, Mac! Come here! I think we're getting a little action."

McNamara climbed up beside him and they peered through the bars. A small procession was leaving the building which they knew contained Mannhiem's quarters and his office. It consisted of four men, three of them regular field guards, with rifles and side-arms. One walked in the lead, and the other two supported the fourth figure between them.

This man seemed to be in a helpless condition. His feet barely moved, and if it had not been for the assistance of the men at his side, he would not have been able to walk. His head lolled on his chest, and his arms were loose and flopping.

The tiny cavalcade walked to the door of the other guardhouse, and the soldier in the lead opened the door with a key which he took from a ring on his belt. Molloy and McNamara noticed that this fellow was the same guard who accompanied the man who brought their meals, and they turned and winked at each other.

When he had unlocked the door, the two men who were supporting the helpless one grabbed him and shoved him into the cell. The door was slammed shut and locked, and the three guards walked away.

"Well," McNamara said, "there's our turkey, Mike."

"What do you suppose they were doing with him over at the headquarters shack? He seems to be in tough shape."

"Probably giving him a bit of a going over. They know he's a spy, and they're pumping him for information, sure as hell. Anything he knows—other G-2 men here in Germany, and stuff like that—would be right up their alley. I hear they have a few methods of persuasion, if a gent won't talk, that aren't very pleasant. He looks as if they've given him the works."

"The lice!" Molloy snarled. "That guy Mannhiem is a smooth customer! He comes in here and he's just as sweet as

all hell, then he steps across the road and makes a wreck out of that Rogers johnny. I'd like to get my hands on him for a few minutes."

"It's all in the game," McNamara stated.

Now that they knew positively that Rogers was in the other shack, they carefully planned the evening's work. Their meal would probably be brought to them about eight o'clock, they figured, just as it was getting dark. The time element would fit in perfectly with their scheme.

"And besides," McNamara said, "if this field is like a lot of others, a patrol will probably be getting in about that time. We ought to have a good chance of nailing a ship."

"Sounds good to me," Molloy agreed.

Just as twilight was beginning to descend on the field, they heard the sound of approaching planes. And as if they had been called, the two guards arrived with the meal.

One of them stood at the door, as usual, and the other carried the tray into the room and set it on the table.

McNamara wandered over to the door and Molloy walked slowly to the table, a big smile on his face.

"Well, pal, what is it tonight? It smells good, whatever it is."

The guard didn't understand what he was saying, but the tone of his voice was agreeable, and he grinned in return.

McNamara came to within two feet of the guard at the door and asked pleasantly,

"Were you ever in Kansas City, pard? I seem to remember your face from somewhere."

Molloy suddenly said, "Okay, Mac!" and they both went into action. It was fast and definite action.

McNamara reached out and grabbed the unsuspecting guard by the front of the jacket and pulled him close. His big right hand whistled straight across and landed

flush on the man's chin. The German crumpled like a sawdust figure.

Molloy had simply whirled the other man around with his right hand and hooked the left with all his power. His fist found the target and the fellow went limp on the floor without a sound.

McNamara dragged his man into the room and closed the door.

"We've got to work fast," he said, searching the guard for the key to the other building. He found it, took the fellows Luger and straightened up. Molloy had disarmed his victim, and they made for the door.

THEY opened it cautiously, and there was no one in sight. The flight had just come in, about two hundred yards down the field, and staying in the deepening shadows, they crossed to the small building where they had seen the soldiers drag the helpless man, during the afternoon.

They arrived there unobserved, and McNamara fitted the key in the great lock. It turned silently, and he swung the door open. In they went.

They both shook their heads as they saw the limp figure, lying on the floor, and Molloy swore.

"He's still out. They must have handled him beautifully.

"Well, grab him, and lets get going. We can't stay here all night," McNamara hissed.

Molloy lifted the unconscious man to his shoulder, and while McNamara peered around, outside, carried him from the house.

They made their way back to the line of woods, then crept toward the planes which were hauled up on the line, motors still turning so that they'd cool slowly.

McNamara said, "Look! Right over there! A Rumpler two-seater! These guys are helping us right along with the party."

"Think we can make it?" Molloy asked.

"Easy! They've chocked the wheels and are fooling with a couple of other crates farther down the line. Come on!"

They reached the ship unobserved, and using their belts, strapped their unconscious companion to the left lower wing. Just as they had completed the task, a shout sounded behind them, from the direction of their cell.

"The jig is up," Molloy said. "Let's not waste any time getting out of here. Get in the pilot's seat. I'll swing her around."

He ripped the chocks from under the wheels and shoved it around by a wing. He leaped for the step just as McNamara gave the crate the throttle.

They went roaring down the field in a beautiful take-off, and Molloy discouraged any pursuit with a raking volley from the guns in the rear pit.

An hour later, they spotted the field of the 24th. Or rather they were spotted by those at the field. Three searchlights were snapped on, and McNamara was almost blinded by the beams. They swooped down, and the pit guns started their yammering chorus. McNamara cursed and set the plane down in a roaring landing as fast as he dared, and suddenly the firing ceased.

A voice called, "Climb out of there, with your hands up!"

"Nuts!" Molloy yelled. "Stop fooling around, will you? You scared the pants off us."

There was a crowd around them in a moment, and one of the field lights was lit. As they descended from the plane, Major Bowers approached.

His face was stern and uncompromising as he said,

"Well, this is a nice how-do-you-do! Where have you two been?"

Molloy grinned. "We've been doing a little Intelligence work, Major."

"You have, eh? I didn't think it was

in you. Where are the two Spads that you took out of here in direct disobedience of my orders?" Bowers wanted to know.

"Well, we sort of lost them," McNamara said. "But we've got something else."

Breadon suddenly appeared at their side, and they both said, "Hello, Eddie." He was silent.

Bowers said, "Well, what excuse have you for this action? I distinctly told you—"

Molloy interrupted him. "Wait a minute, Major. We've got something that'll put the 24th right on the front page. We thought we'd steal a march on G-2, so we went over and did their job for them. We brought back that Intelligence man, Rogers."

"You *what*?" Bowers demanded.

"Sure," McNamara grinned. "He's right over there on the wing."

They neared the strapped figure and saw that the man had regained consciousness. They removed the belts that had held him secure, and he got to his feet. Breadon started to chuckle, then burst into roaring laughter.

Bowers said, "Who is this man?"

Molloy and McNamara stared at him. "This is Rogers," they chorused. "We broke him loose and carted him away."

Bowers looked at them disdainfully, then turned to the man. He spoke rapidly in German for a moment, and the fellow answered him slowly.

He turned to McNamara and Molloy, and his words were accompanied by Breadon's wild laughter.

"Rogers," he told them in an icy tone, "was rescued by G-2 men late last night. We knew about it this morning."

McNamara and Molloy stared at him unbelievably.

"But who is this bird? We saw them drag him into a cell! We thought—"

"I doubt that you ever thought," Bowers snapped. "This man is Mannhiem's cook. He was thrown in the guardhouse for drunkenness. You made a fine rescue, I must say!" But his sternness had broken on the surface, and he regarded the two flabbergasted pilots with a smile.

Molloy turned to McNamara and said, "Well, can you beat that! We go over for a G-2 guy and we bring back a Jerry."

"I don't understand it," McNamara said.

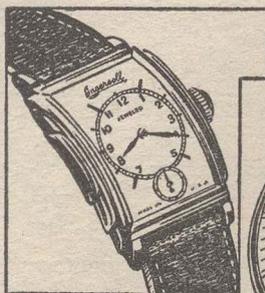
The roar of the surrounding crowd didn't drown out Breadon's shout.

"You'll understand it soon, you dummies! You're right behind the eight ball! In fact, the major says you're going back to Pool!

THE END

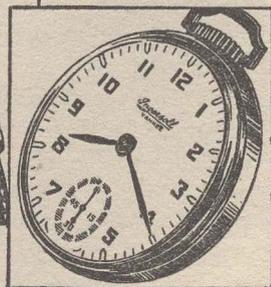
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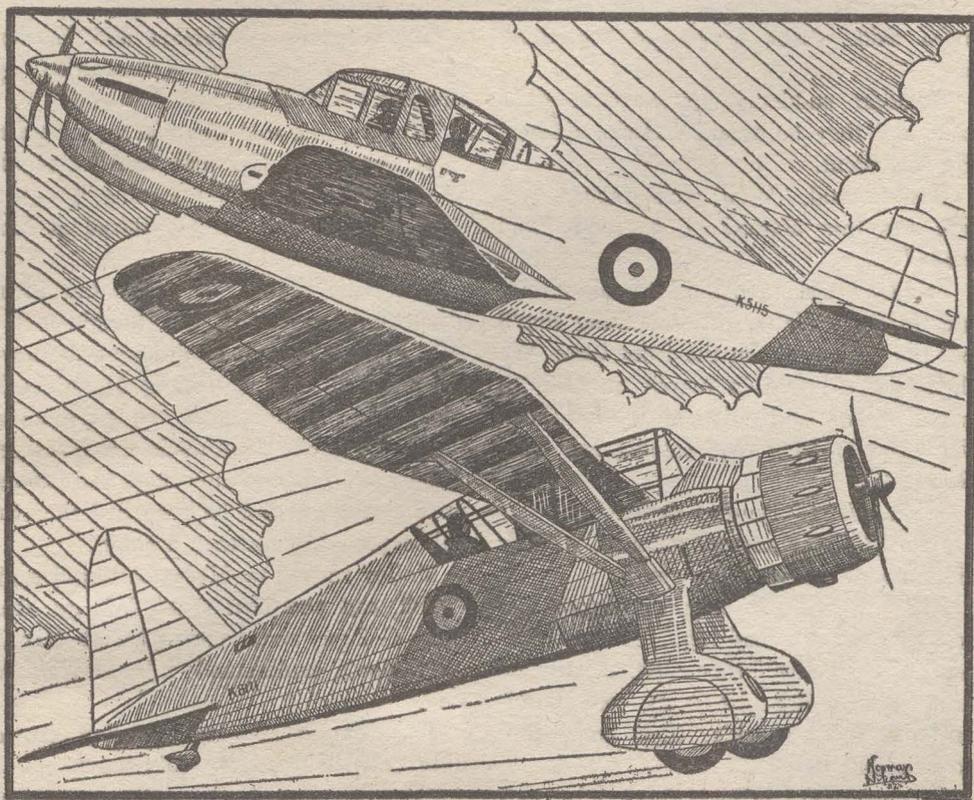
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WAR WINGS

BY NORMAN WITCOMB



THE monoplanes are it again this month, but for the sake of variety, we have an assortment. The low-winger on top is the new Hawker Henley light bomber. It is powered with the now famous Rolls-Royce Merlin which takes it places at a speed which leaves the fighter pilots mumbling about obsolete equipment. The cabin is covered by a sliding hatch and an opening for the rear-gunner. It has all the latest developments, such as flaps, retractable undercarriages, radio, and the like. It bears a great resemblance to the Hawker "Hurricane" fighter—which, incidently, is one fighter that no bomber can get away from. While the Henley is a light bomber, it can carry a heavy load—much more than the light bomber of a few years ago. This is only

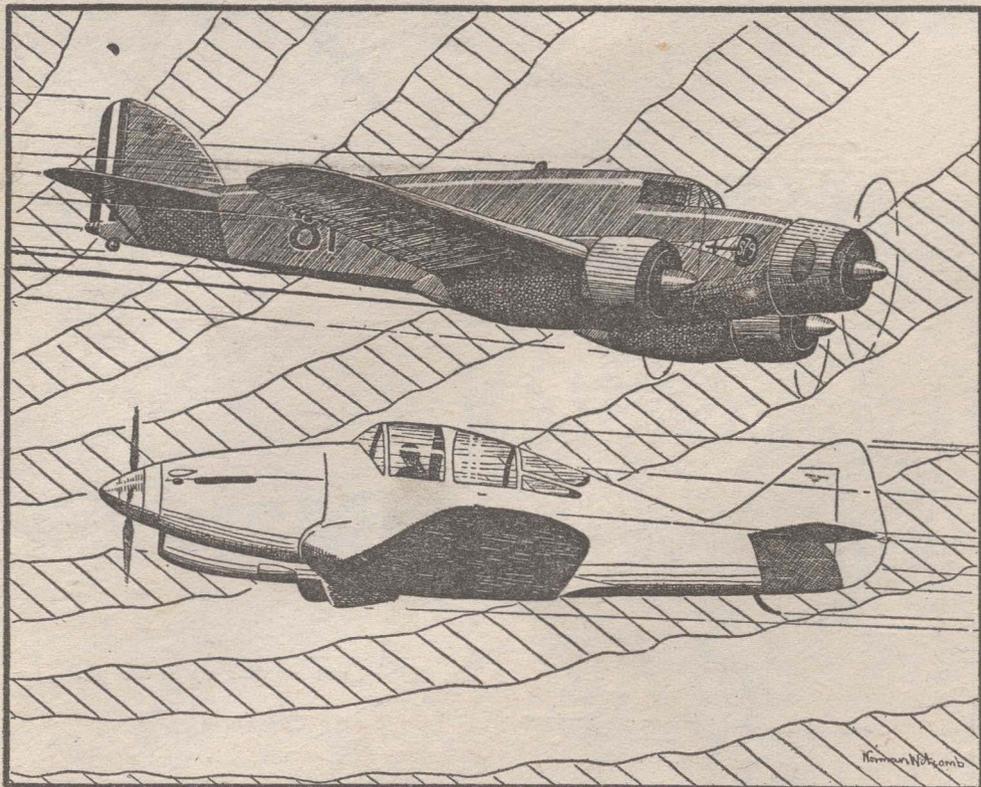
natural, as when speed, size, and performance increase, load increases too.

THE high-wing monoplane is the Westland Lysander which takes the 840 h.p. Bristol Mercury. This job is designed as an army co-operation unit. The wing is slotted and flapped to the fullest extent. This arrangement gives it an extraordinary range of speeds. The wheel spats carry landing-lights. The plane is fully equipped to carry out its duties as an army co-operation machine. It has an excellent visibility for both the pilot and the observer. This plane carries everything from c.p. propellor to a sliding top and has been ordered in quantity for the Royal Air Force.

ON THIS page, we have gone to the Italian peninsula for a Savoia-Marchetti bomber. This ship is powered with three radial engines developing 1,000 h.p. It is Mussolini's fastest and cuts through the air at 270 m.p.h. Of course, it is equipped with all the latest improvements—retractable undercarriage, variable-pitch propellers, radio, etc. If we compare this plane to the British Bristol Blenheim, we find that the Blenheim does 280 with only two motors. So figure out for yourself if that third motor does much good.

THE second plane is one of the most interesting yet shown on these pages and is nevertheless worth a bit of atten-

tion. It is the Miles P.V. two-seater fighter. (And a fine high speed trainer.) When I say high speed, I mean just that. The Miles does 290 m.p.h., which is some stepping even if it does not surpass the Spitfire or Hurricane. When we look at the power plant we find that it is the tried and true Rolls Royce Kestrel in its latest series, XVI, and it turns out 600 h.p. The clean streamlining is striking and no doubt goes a long way towards helping the Kestrel pull along the outfit at 290. As a trainer, it must show that the British are playing around with fast stuff and want their pilots trained accordingly. As a two-seater fighter, it will undoubtedly cause someone a terrific amount of trouble.

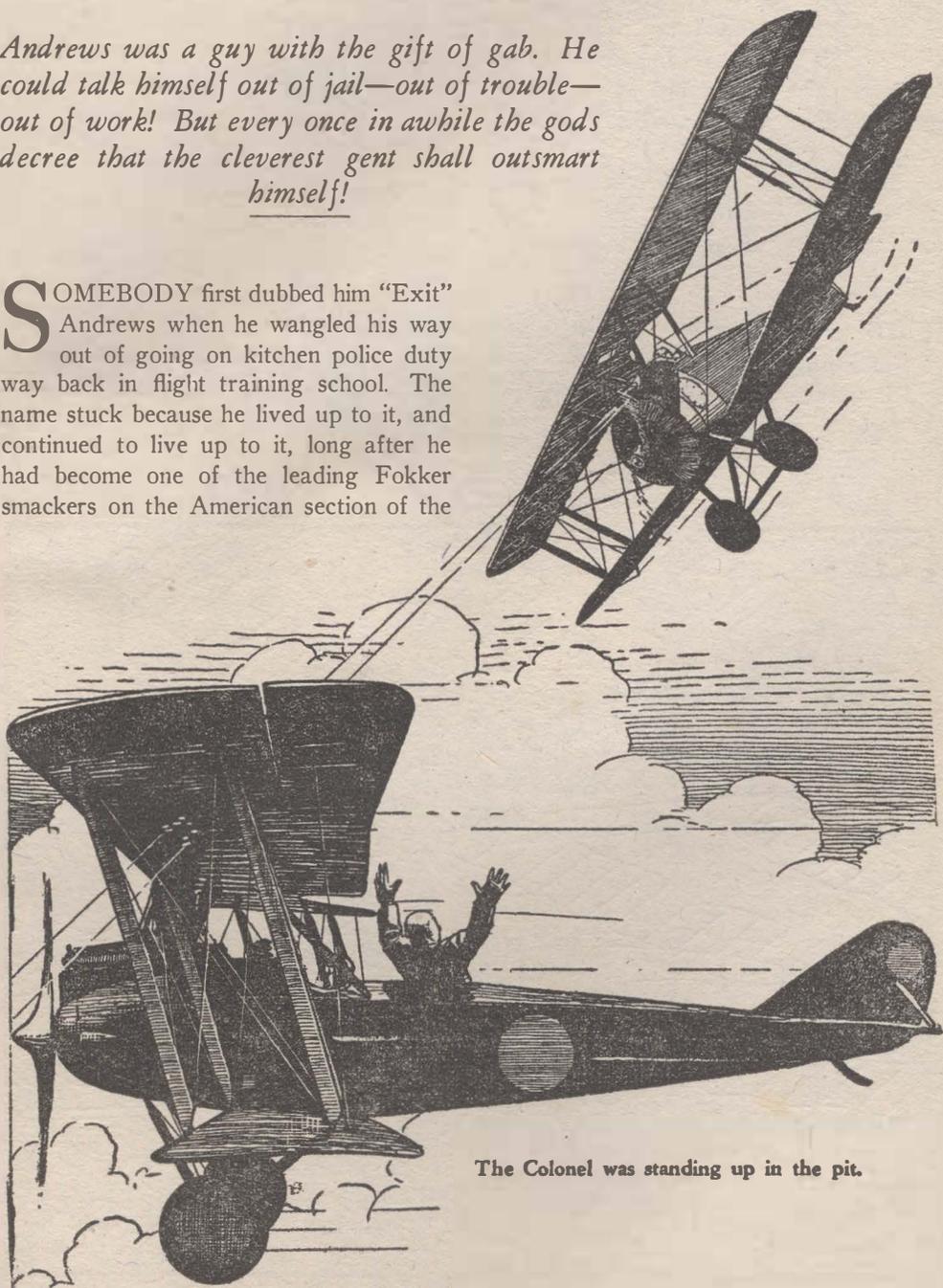


The One-Man War

by LARRY JONES

Andrews was a guy with the gift of gab. He could talk himself out of jail—out of trouble—out of work! But every once in awhile the gods decree that the cleverest gent shall outsmart himself!

SOMEBODY first dubbed him "Exit" Andrews when he wangled his way out of going on kitchen police duty way back in flight training school. The name stuck because he lived up to it, and continued to live up to it, long after he had become one of the leading Fokker smackers on the American section of the



The Colonel was standing up in the pit.

Front. Stick him with a job he didn't like, and Exit would get out of it somehow. Surround him with five or six enemy aircraft and he'd get out of that, too. And usually leave only about half of the original Fokkers still flying. For that reason the gang didn't tag "Lazy" on him as well, though it certainly fitted him when there weren't any enemy aircraft around.

At the moment, he was going through the motions of getting ready for the early morning show. His thoughts, however, were dwelling upon a very pretty young lady from Kansas City who served coffee and sinkers in the Y.M.C.A. canteen at Issy, about twenty-three miles due north of Exit's home drome, the Seventy-Fourth Pursuits. He had met her only the week before, and whether or not it had been a case of love at first sight, Exit had certainly developed a desire to see her soon, and considerably more often. But that was the hitch. Even for Exit it was a physical impossibility to lead six Camels some ten or fifteen miles behind the German lines, and chew the fat with a pretty girl twenty miles behind the *American* lines—all at the same time.

Fully convinced of that truth, Exit ran his engine up, cocked an ear and frowned. He eased back the throttle and nodded his engine fitter over to the cockpit.

"Hear that, Corporal?" he grunted. "Doesn't sound so good to me."

The non-com puckered up his face and listened.

"Sounds sweet as a nut to me, Skipper," he said proudly. "That's the best engine in the squadron."

"I still don't like it," Exit growled, and climbed from the pit.

He walked over to where Major Carter stood on the tarmac, waiting to wave the patrol off and then go get the coffee and cognac he'd left cooling in the mess. When he saw Exit his brows knitted. He held up one hand.

"Don't say it—let me guess!" he snapped. "You've got a pain in your belly, or a cinder in your eye, or something else. Anyway, you don't want to lead this patrol. Right?"

"My engine, Major," Exit said. "Sounds bad. No, I'll lead them up, but I'll turn the Flight over to Baker when we get to the line. I want to give this ship a good testing. We won't meet anything. We never do on the early show, anyway."

The C.O. sighed.

"Sometimes I wish you were still a fledgling," he said. "Then I could land on you with both feet. I know damn well you've got something cooked up. But go ahead and test your damn crate. You *might* be telling me the truth."

"No senior flight leader would lie to his Commanding Officer," Exit said in serious tone.

"I know!" the other snapped. "You always have some damn excuse that is part truth. But one of these days you'll get your fall. You wait and see. Now go get the patrol off!"

Exit grinned and trotted back to his ship. He killed the engine and walked around to the nose. With a casual movement that no one would have noticed though they were watching, he reached up under the cowlings and gave one of the spark plug wires a hard tug. No, the wire didn't come off. An out-wangler of Exit's experience was not that crude.

Five minutes later, his engine roaring up in full throated song, he lead 'C' Flight off the drome, climbed easily to six thousand, then leveled off and headed east. When he was about half a mile inside the American lines it happened. In short, vibration took care of the partly loosened spark plug wire and it dropped off. Eight of the rotary cylinders did their duty, but the ninth didn't do a damn thing. And Exit grinned.

"Anybody would be a fool to go over

the lines with a missing engine," he murmured. "Yup, just a dumb fool."

Wagging his wings, he caught Baker's attention. He signaled the sub-leader to take the patrol, and promptly banked down and around out of the formation. Thirty minutes later he was pouring coffee down his gullet and feasting his eyes on the neat little bit of fluff from Kansas City. An hour later he was in the air and "limping" back to Seventy-Four's field on eight cylinders.

AS HE glided down to land he took a look at the tarmac and sat up with a start. The five other planes of 'C' Flight were on the line. He took a look at his watch, held it to his ear to make sure it was still running. It was, and so 'C' Flight shouldn't be due back from its patrol for another hour yet.

"What the hell?" was his only comment, as he floated down to a perfect three point.

There was a look of utter disbelief on the engine fitter's grease-smear'd face as he grabbed a wingtip and helped Exit swing around into line.

"One cylinder's gone, Skipper," he said as though unable to believe his own voice. "Get hit by one of those Fokkers?"

"Fokkers?" Exit echoed. "What's 'C' Flight doing back so soon?"

"Because of the Fokkers," the fitter explained. "Ran into a crowd of them just over the lines. Baker decided not to chance the four to one scrap. He's a wise pilot. That reminds me, the Major wants to see you as soon as you land. I— Look here, will you? An ignition wire is off! And I put them damn things on to stay for the rest of the war!"

"Do it again," Exit grunted, and started over toward the mess.

The C.O. greeted him with a hard eye.

"Well?" he inquired tight-lipped.

"Ignition wire shook loose," Exit explained. "I knew that there was something wrong with that—"

"Prop-wash!" the C.O. snarled, and pointed a stiff finger. "I trailed you, you big lummo! I saw you leave the patrol, and I saw where you landed. Say, do you think I came over on the last boat?"

Exit tried to think of something to say, but couldn't. He tried again, but it was weak.

"My fitter says that Baker met Fokkers. Hell, Major, you know I wouldn't have quit them if I'd even dreamed they'd run into trouble."

"Of course I do!" the C.O. barked. "Your record proves that you never ran out on a fight yet. But that's not the idea. It's that something *might* have happened while you were off gabbing with that Y.M.C.A. girl. Oh yes, I know about her, too."

"You're right, Major," Exit nodded solemnly. "I've learned my lesson. I've ducked out of my last patrol—honest."

Major Carter placed both his hands on the desk, leaned forward and looked Exit right in the eye.

"I'll say you have!" he snapped. "They don't have any combat patrols at Pau."

"Pau?" Exit fairly exploded the word. "You mean—?"

"That as soon as I can get his transfer papers ready, Captain Exit Andrews is going to Pau to act as flight instructor for one month. And if at the end of the month the C.O. at Pau thinks he needs a second month, *he'll get it!*"

The pilot unconsciously put out his hand for support, found nothing, and automatically caught his balance.

"My God, Major!" he cried. "I couldn't teach a bunch of wet-behind-the-ears lunkheads to fly in a month of Sundays! I'd be lousy, no kidding. I might crash with the poor guys and kill them, or something. I belong at the Front where there are Huns. Dammit, haven't I shot down enough of them to prove that?"

"And more," the C.O. nodded. "But

you're going to Pau. If you can't teach flying, then you'll teach machine gun drill on the ground. Why, you big ox, if I didn't like you so damn much—didn't think you were the best pilot on the Front—I'd have gone to Pershing with the request to slap you against a wall long ago. You've gotten away with murder, and you know it. Well, we're calling a halt right now. You're getting a month's visit to Pau to see if you can't cure yourself of wangling out of your share of the duties at a Front line squadron."

Exit's heart began to go cold.

"I'd shoot myself at the end of a week at Pau," he declared.

Major Carter snorted.

"Go ahead!" he grunted. "You'll figure some way for the bullet to go in the opposite direction. You'll—"

HE STOPPED short as the throbbing beat of a Mercedes engine drifted down from the sky outside. They both went over to the window and looked out. A German Rumpler was coasting down to a landing. The usual crosses were not on the wings and fuselage, however. Instead, there were huge white discs painted on the jet black fabric. Major Carter swore softly through his teeth.

"That blasted Wing Colonel!" he grated. "Him and his damn captured Fokker. Some day an American pilot isn't going to recognize those white discs and shoot that ship full of holes."

"He'll have to do it twenty miles this side of the lines," Exit murmured. "That's the closest old Fuss and Feathers Bradshaw ever gets to the Front. Besides, everybody knows that ship of his."

"That's just the hell of it," the C.O. muttered. "I wonder what the devil he wants this time?"

Ten minutes later the C.O., as well as the rest of the squadron, found out. Old Fuss and Feathers gathered them together in the mess, beamed on them for a mo-

ment or two, then he cleared his throat.

"I came down this morning, gentlemen," he said, "to warn you to prepare yourselves for some of the most active service you've seen on this or any other Front. As we all know, this has been a most quiet sector. Hardly anything for the four combat squadrons to do, outside of ordinary routine patrols. Well, it looks as though all that is going to be changed. Intelligence has informed me that three new German staffels have moved up in front of us."

The Colonel paused and gazed about as though expecting to see every pilot in the room gasp and clutch at his chest. However, they were all veterans, and the news of the arrival of one new squadron, or a dozen, didn't impress them one way or another. After all, you can only fire your guns at one Fokker at a time. That is, and expect to get results.

"Three new staffels, gentlemen," the Colonel repeated. "That means there is a lot of extra work cut out for all of us. And, naturally, I intend to do my share. Heretofore I've been receiving squadron reports by courier. In the future I'm going to spend all of my time at one squadron or another. In short, keep moving around and getting closer to what you're actually doing. We cannot afford to let the Germans even *begin* to wrest mastery of the air from us."

The Wing C.O. paused again, and had there been an American flag handy he probably would have snatched it up and waved it above his head.

"Now," he said, "I come to the real object of my visit. For several months Lieutenant Sparks has been my pilot, but I'm going to make a change. By turns, the leading pilot of each squadron will act as my pilot for a period of three weeks. As you know, I am really the only active flying Wing Commander on this section of the Front. And I intend to keep on being one. But in view of the addition of three

German staffels across the way, I think it better to have as my pilot a man who is better acquainted with his particular patrol area than Lieutenant Sparks might be. Anyway, I am taking a pilot from this squadron to see how the experiment works out."

Old Fuss and Feathers paused for the third time, and turned to Major Carter.

"I'll leave it to you, Major," he said, "to select whom you consider your best pilot. Have him report to me some time tomorrow. Now I must hurry along to Twenty-Seven Squadron. Come along, Lieutenant."

Pink-cheeked Lieutenant Sparks followed the Wing Colonel outside like a faithful fox terrier, and the door swung shut. For several seconds there was absolute silence in the mess. Then a tall red-head spoke up.

"Thank God I've only got one Fokker and a balloon to my credit!" he breathed aloud.

Like comments followed on top of that one. Exit looked at Major Carter and grinned. Inwardly he was thanking the blessed Lord that he was headed for Pau. It would be Heaven, teaching ham-handed fledglings at Pau to fly, compared to chaulfering old Fuss and Feathers around in his damn captured Rumpler. But Exit's heart sort of missed half a beat as the C.O. grinned back and motioned him outside.

"With three new staffels in front of us," the C.O. said when they were alone, "I guess I'd better not ship you to Pau."

"You're right, Major," Exit nodded. "We'll need every pilot we've got."

"I'm thinking of the Colonel," Carter replied. "The poor fool *does* need someone who knows the sector, or he's liable to get too close to the lines. So that makes you *it*."

"Hey, Major! Listen—!"

"Report to Colonel Bradshaw in the morning," the C.O. cut him off. "He may have a lot of half-cracked ideas, but he's

hell on wheels when it comes to discipline. He's already shipped three pilots back to the States. It'll do you a damn sight more good than my sending you to Pau. I said you'd be taking a fall, Exit. Well, this is it. Try wangling out from under *his* thumb for awhile."

With a stiff grin the C.O. turned on his heel and walked away. Exit groaned, watched the Colonel's Rumpler take off, followed it until it was no more than a speck, low down on the western horizon. Then he groaned again and went over to the mess. Three cognacs later he smashed a clenched fist on the zinc-topped bar.

"I'll show Carter!" he growled. "I'll show him that he needs me here to do my stuff!"

He tossed off a fourth cognac for emphasis, plowed out to the line and roared to a grease-ball to twist his prop. Just as he was about to take off, Major Carter rushed up to his ship and stuck his face over the cockpit rim.

"Where are you going?" he snapped.

"Over to show those bums they picked the wrong sector!" Exit roared, and banged the throttle open.

TEARING across the field, he pulled clear, went up for altitude, then high-balled full out toward the lines. He was out Hun hunting and he didn't have to fool around wasting gas and oil before he got results. Less than a mile inside the German lines, two blue-nosed Fokkers ripped down from behind some clouds and opened fire. Exit had spotted them long before they decided to pile down. He grinned and hauled his ship around in a dime turn.

"Come on!" he roared. "I just want to be sure our balloon boys see this."

Throttling so that the two Fokkers could easily catch up with him, Exit waited until Spandaus slugs were starting to snick through his wingtips. Then he rammed the throttle wide open and

pulled the Camel up in a roaring loop that nearly took the wings off. At the top of the loop he held the ship steady, started to roll out, then slammed back and went tearing down the back half of the loop. The maneuver pulled the Fokkers apart. The one on the right tried to cut back up at Exit, and its pilot took a faceful of Vickers bullets. The Fokker became just so much flame and smoke, and then fell over and went straight down.

The other Fokker pilot streaked out from under Exit's fire and came curving around to hurl a few short bursts at him that were too darn close for comfort.

"This guy's good!" Exit muttered.

He made as though to dive away, but went into a half spin. After two turns he came out of it, held the Camel in a dive straight down, then yanked it heavenward in a mighty power zoom. But the Fokker pilot was not to be fooled. He waited for Exit to come up, and had not the Yank pilot slammed off the zoom a hundred feet before he expected to, he would have been nailed colder than an iced mackerel. As it was, the German shot his initials in the Camel's tail before Exit could pull all the way out into the clear.

However, that seemed to add up to all the German could do. Exit faked a right split arc, reversed himself in the area of a dime, and gunned a blasting broadside at the Fokker. Nothing could have stayed in the air under the withering hail of Vickers bullets, and the Fokker did not prove to be any exception to the rule. It virtually came apart in midair, and slithered earthward in a shower of small pieces.

Exit didn't watch it go down. As soon as he was sure his bursts had gone home he swung around close to the American lines. He flew due north so that the observers in the swaying baskets of the Yank balloon line could get a good look at his squadron and personal markings.

Then he banked east and roared back into German air. He had to fly five miles deep before he got action this time. But he got it sure enough.

Three more blue-nosed Fokkers came charging in at him from three different sides. By a tricky bit of flying he broke through the "ring" and lead his next victims up close to the Yank balloons. There, with the odds three to one against him, he went to work in earnest. For the next fifteen minutes he flew and fought as he had never fought before. Nor was it a total loss. On the contrary it was close to a total loss for the Germans.

One of them went down in flames. The second went down without its right wings. And the third just managed to get the hell out and go tearing east as Exit's ammo belts ran out, and he couldn't hurl any more nickle-jacketed lead at the remaining Fokker.

"Four in one patrol!" he chuckled as he gave the balloon boys another good look at his markings. "Will the C.O. decide he really needs me to do patrols? And *how* he will! This lets me out of wet nursing old Fuss and Feathers."

Flicking a hand in salute to the balloon observers, he crossed over to the American side and flew southwest toward Seventy-Four's field. As he was about to cut his throttle and slide down, he glanced off his right wings and made a face. In the distance was the familiar silhouette of Colonel Bradshaw's Rumpler. The Wing C.O. was obviously being flown back to his own headquarters.

"Fly you around?" Exit echoed. "Not me! Balloons will be sure to phone word through to Carter, and everything will be fine and dandy."

Ten minutes later he had taxied to the line and legged out. The mechanic's eyes were fixed on the countless Spandaus bullet holes in the fabric.

"Gosh, Skipper!" he exclaimed. "You musta tackled the whole damn Hun Air

Service. That ship is a nice mess!"

"Just five of them," Exit grinned. "And four of them won't be around any more."

Full of joy and expectancy, he strolled over to the squadron office and went inside. The C.O. was just shoving the field phone away from him as he entered. Exit watched for the grin, waited for the words of praise. He waited in vain. The C.O. just looked at him and grunted.

"Was that balloons?" Exit asked.

"Yup," the C.O. nodded, and began reading a patrol report on his desk.

Exit frowned.

"Didn't they have anything to say?" he ventured.

"Sure," Carter said looking up. "They confirmed the four Fokkers you just got."

The pilot grinned.

"Guess maybe I should lead a few patrols against these three new staffels, eh?" he grunted. "We'll take care of them in short order."

"Sure we will," the C.O. agreed. Then added, "But without you."

"You mean—?" Exit gasped.

"I do!"

"But for the lovamike!" Exit cried,

"Doesn't getting four in less than an hour mean anything?"

"Certainly it does!" the senior officer shot right back at him. "If you can get four in an hour they can't be such terrible hell benders! You're out of luck, Exit. This is one time you don't wangle your way out of something that doesn't strike your fancy. You're going to take the cure with the Colonel whether you like it or not. It's the old fall coming to you, you know."

"Unless the Colonel changes his mind," Exit growled.

Major Carter stopped reading the report, looked up again and smiled.

"Right, unless the Colonel changes his mind," he said. "But the man doesn't live who can get him to change his mind once he gets a toe hold on a crackpot idea. He

was here again, just after you left. He almost thinks his idea is going to win the war."

Exit made no comment. He pulled a cigarette from his pocket, touched a match to it and puffed in deep, concentrated thought for a moment. Then suddenly he turned to Carter.

"Supposing the Colonel does change his mind," he said slowly. "What then?"

"What do you mean, what then?" the C. O. echoed.

"Would you still go through with that damn Pau idea of yours?" Exit asked.

The C. O. opened his mouth, and started to nod, but checked himself, and stared hard at Exit.

"No," he said presently. "Pau is out if you can get the Colonel to change his mind. For one thing, it would mean that we'd see less of him around here. If you can wangle your way out by getting the Colonel to change his mind, you don't go to Pau. But, it'll be a tough job, and don't say I didn't warn you."

It was like a great weight being lifted from Exit's shoulders. He grinned and flipped a finger to his helmet.

"A deal," he said. "I'll take my chances on riding for a fall."

As he went outside, Major Carter scowled at the closed door for several moments. There was a worried look in his eyes, and he gave a half shake of his head.

"You're crazy to even let him try," he muttered to himself. "He'll do something dizzy, and Bradshaw will crucify him just as sure as Exit is the best damn pilot on any Front—confound his wangling hide!"

ALTHOUGH his flight was not scheduled to go on patrol the next morning, Exit nevertheless was on the tarmac bright and early inspecting the repairs made on his bullet-riddled plane. Finally, when 'A' Flight had been gone an hour or more, he expressed satisfaction with

his ship and legged up into the pit.

"Going up to give her a good test!" he shouted at his grease-ball. "See you later."

A few moments later he took off and climbed steadily in ever widening circles until he was just under some clouds at seven thousand feet above the field. Flattening out, he stared hard down at the field, made sure no plane was taking off to follow him, and then plowed the nose up into the clouds.

Eventually coming out on top, he banked until the compass needle pointed due south and flew steadily in that direction for some forty minutes or more. Going down through the clouds, he came out to find himself over a desolate patch of ground. The area was five miles or so square, and there wasn't a sign of troops or civilians within three miles of its borders.

"Just what the doctor ordered," he grunted, and stuck the nose down in a power dive.

A few hundred feet over a level strip flanked on both sides by scraggly woods, he eased back the throttle, pulled partly out of the dive and wind-braked down to a landing. Leaving the prop ticking over, he reached around in back of his seat, pulled out a can of paint and a brush, and legged to the ground. Then began a task that took him less than half an hour. One by one he painted out every numeral and mark of squadron insignia on the plane. When he was finished, the ship was dull grey from prop to tail skid, and from wingtip to wingtip, except for the usual tri-color bullseyes. Those he left as they were, for the simple reason that their removal would not hide the nationality of the ship. Its design alone would tell that to anyone.

Taking a few extra minutes to inspect his work and make sure he had not overlooked some marking that would reveal the ship's true identity, he then tossed the

paint and brush away and climbed back into the pit.

"Now a-Rumpler hunting we will go," he grunted, and opened up the throttle.

Climbing back up above the clouds, he set the nose on a compass course due north and held it there for well over an hour. Twice he spotted the silhouettes of Yank planes in the distance and altered his course so that he would not pass them close by. Then, finally, he went down through the clouds again and noted from land marks that he was still a good ten miles or more shy of Wing headquarters. He gave the ship full throttle again, but remained just under the clouds.

Another few moments and he could easily pick out the Wing field, despite the thin ground haze that had not yet been entirely blown away by the morning wind. And as he did he sat up straight in the seat and grunted. A black bug was crawling across Wing field, picking up more speed as it moved forward. A black bug at his altitude, perhaps, but Exit didn't need more than one good look to recognize it as Colonel Bradshaw's Rumpler. In fact, as the ship cleared and banked toward the east and presented itself broadside to Exit, he could make out the large white discs on the fuselage and wings.

"Just in time, what I mean!" he murmured. "Any later and I'd have had to hunt all over hell and the Front for it."

Kicking rudder, he swung his Camel around and shoved the nose down in a long dive, aimed to carry him well beyond the Wing field. As he lost altitude he kept his eye on the Rumpler. It was flying low, its pilot making no effort to gain altitude, and the ship was headed south-east. Abruptly, though, it banked sharply and went streaking straight toward the east.

"What the hell?" Exit murmured, and tapped his own left rudder. "Is the old buzzard feeling brave this morning, and actually getting *close* to the Front? Fat

chance. Hold your hat, Colonel, here we come!"

Steepening his dive, Exit roared down another couple of thousand feet or so. Then he squinted through the ring sight to make sure the Rumpler wasn't in line with his guns, and jabbed both trigger trips. The twin Vickers yammered savagely and streams of jetting flame, laced by wavy tracer smoke, went zinging down across the sky. No sooner had he opened up with his guns than the Rumpler whipped into a half roll and went cutting off to the left. Exit was close enough now to make out Colonel Bradshaw in the rear cockpit, and he saw the Wing commander half rise from his seat and lean toward his pilot. Exit chuckled, and jabbed his trigger trips again.

"Bet this takes years off that baby-faced Sparks!" he grunted. "He—Hey!"

The last burst from his lips as the Rumpler cut around once again toward the east. Colonel Bradshaw was standing up in the pit now, and waving both hands over the top of his head. Keeping above the Rumpler, Exit steadied himself, then flipped his Camel over into a vertical dive and drilled two long bursts through the right wing tips of the Rumpler. The once-German plane started zooming all over the sky, its pilot making a desperate effort to shake off Exit and roar off into the clear.

But Exit was not the type to let a good job go half done. As though the nose of his Camel was tied to the tail of the Rumpler, he followed it around and around in the air, taking careful pot shots that came close to the other ship—but not too close. Colonel Bradshaw had all the appearances of a man gone completely berserk. One hand he waved at Exit, and the other he seemed to be thumping on his unfortunate pilot's head.

Roaring in close, and ducking his head so that neither the Colonel or his pilot could get a good look at his goggled face, Exit drilled a long burst over the top

center section of the Rumpler and almost smacked that same center section with his wheels as he roared on by. The wild maneuver was more than too much for the Rumpler's pilot. The ship's nose dropped and the plane went streaking for the ground below.

"Just some more to make sure!" Exit shouted through his own laughter. "So you want to fly around this sector, huh? Like hell you do, Old Fuss and Feathers."

Cutting back sharply, Exit tore straight at the diving Rumpler, hurdled over it and then threw his Camel into a half roll. A bare hundred feet above the ground he pulled the ship out and zoomed upward. Eyes glued to the ring sight, he drilled a final burst past the left wingtips. And a final burst it was as far as the Rumpler's pilot was concerned. The guy kicked rudder savagely, cut his throttle and fish-tailed down to a fast landing. The only trouble was that he didn't pick the most level spot to land on.

As the right lower wingtip crabbed and the plane swung crazily around, Exit held his breath. And as the wing buckled and the ship started pivoting on the broken spars like a top, he let out the air in his lungs in a groan. And when the tail went straight up to point at the sky, and then the Rumpler flopped slowly over on its back, he let out a yelp of alarm. But a few seconds later, when he saw Colonel Bradshaw crawl out from the wreckage, apparently none the worse for the upside down landing, he let out a shout of joy and went climbing for as much altitude as possible in the least amount of time.

"And that's that!" he said as he steamed up through the clouds and came out on top. "If Bradshaw steps into any kind of ship again on this Front, then I'm a Chinaman."

GRINNING with heartfelt satisfaction, Exit roared south until he was again over the desolate strip. Again he landed,

and again he pulled out a can of paint and a brush from in back of his seat. The paint color this time was white, the original white of the numerals and insignia. Working at top speed, he followed the faint outlines of the insignia, which he could see through the dull grey paint, and filled each one in. Though it was a hasty job, only close examination would have proved to anyone that it was a repaint job. As soon as he was finished he took off and flew further south to Twenty-Seven squadron. There he bummed some breakfast and some gas.

It was close to nine o'clock when he finally floated down to an easy three point on Seventy-Four's field. Hardly had he taxied up to the line and legged out than a staff car came rushing around the end hangar. A Wing pennant was fitted to both front fenders. The car braked to a halt just in front of Major Carter, who was coming out of 'A' Flight hangar. Exit walked over as Colonel Bradshaw climbed out of the rear seat.

"I can only stay a minute, Carter!" the

Wing C. O. called out. "The idea I spoke of yesterday is off. I had the most terrible experience of my life this morning, and I'm not doing any more flying. Fact is, when I talked with G. H. Q. a short time ago the General told me to do no more flying. Say, do you know of any plane in this sector that's a dull grey but carries no markings? It—Good Lord, *your* ships are dull grey aren't they? Did one of your pilots take one up this morning that had no markings—not even a number?"

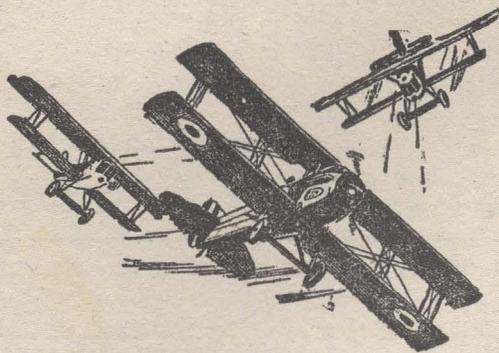
Carter blinked.

"No, sir. All our ships are marked. Why, sir?"

"It dived on me, and fired!" Bradshaw replied. "The plane, my Rumpler, I mean, cracked up as it landed. By God, I'd like to find out who that pilot was!"

Carter's eyes hardened, flickered to Exit's face. The pilot beat him to the question.

"I didn't see any such ship come down at Twenty-Seven where I was," he said. "I flew down there on test and had breakfast with them."



NEXT MONTH!

The war-ripped skies are the place for a fighting Falcon—and it is fitting that his wings should be red! Red with the heat of battle and the screaming song of Steel. Once more Barry Rand takes to the air with Sika at his side. And once again the staffels of the German Air must fly in deepest fear!

And Leo Vincent has written for us "Murder Walks a Wing," with that fighting, two-fisted Danny Devlin at the stick. The Ace of Spads patrols once more the clouds of blood!

The January issue contains other of your favorite authors and more hell-raising action than you can find in a month of Sundays.

**DARE-DEVIL
ACES**

January issue—on the stands—
Nov. 25.

"Oh, this didn't happen anywheres near Twenty-Seven," the Colonel broke in. "It was up north, near Wing."

Exit kept his face straight, but didn't dare look at Carter. He had told the truth, for when he was at Twenty-Seven his ship wasn't without markings. He couldn't help turning to the Colonel.

"Shot at you, sir? Forced you down?" he echoed. "Must have been some pilot who didn't know your markings. But even at that, if it was near Wing—! Why, a pilot who'd do that should be shipped back to the States!"

"Shipped back?" the Wing C. O. echoed in a loud voice. "I should say not! If I can locate that pilot I'll see that he gets the D. F. C.—and a month's leave in Paris to boot!"

"A—a month's leave in Paris?" Exit gagged.

Bradshaw was already talking to Major Carter.

"So unnerved I'm not even talking straight," he said. "Do you know what happened? It's almost unbelievable! A damn German pilot escaped last night from the prison camp at Contreau. The devil knocked Lieutenant Sparks senseless and stole his uniform, then rushed out and got in that Rumpler of mine. *And with me in it waiting for Sparks!* God, we were off the ground and half way to the Front before I realized what happened.

Thank the Lord that pilot in the Camel happened along! He saw me waving and fighting that German. He stopped that devil from crossing the lines and made him land. We cracked up, but I didn't get a scratch. The German broke both legs!"

The Wing C. O. paused for breath.

"Damnedest thing I ever had happen to me in my life," he said. "Well, I must be getting on. What I wouldn't give to find that pilot! I'm posting notices in General Orders. There's the D. F. C. and a month for him in Paris if I ever do locate him. Well, I'll be going."

Like a punch drunk boxer who really shouldn't be standing on his feet but somehow is, Exit Andrews watched the Wing Colonel climb into his car and drive off. Then, dully, he saw Major Carter go over to his ship and touch a finger to the squadron insignia. Carter wiped the tip of his finger and came walking back toward him. Steady eyes bored into his own.

"I call that a hell of a note," the C. O. said, nodding his head slowly. "The Colonel won't find that lad now, of course. And a D. F. C. and a month in Paris waiting for him. A hell of a note, I'll say."

Exit tried to grin, but it was a very, very weak grin. In fact, it wasn't any grin.

"Yeah," he mumbled sadly. "I call it a hell of a note, too!"

THE END



BIG-BOOK WESTERN

Glamorous, thrilling action in the untamed West!

Rebellion within the peeled-pole stockade of Leavenworth fort. . . Buckskin mountain-men sweeping down from the Red Hell of the upper Platte. . . A half-blind, outcast plainsman leading his longhair legion against his own country's flag. . . A gripping, smashing, complete novel: **THE BUCKSKIN REBELLION** by Ed Earl Repp. And another book-length novel you won't want to miss: **A TINHORN TAMES A TOWN** by Art Lawson.

Get the December-January issue of the new and bigger *Big-Book Western* at your newsstand today. Now 160 pages of breathless adventure—at no increase in price!

THE BUZZARD BATTALION

TWENTY swift years have slipped into history between that first day when reckless men flew their fragile crates of war through the skies of the Western Front, and this present day, when Aviation still beckons with a crazy laugh to those Buzzards who love the open spaces of the sky.

Much of the battle smoke has gone with the wind, but in recent days the flames have mounted high in Europe and in Asia. We are sorry about this. We had hoped that the world was done with war, and with all the pain and suffering that it can bring to the innocent.

But somehow, above the smoke and the flame, far higher than the guns of war can reach, rides the reckless, daring Spirit of the Air. This spirit is not necessarily confined to the men who fly fighting crafts across the sky. It is the spirit that also belongs to those men who made flying history at the old county fairs. It is the courage that is as much a part of test pilots as the red blood that runs through their veins—the reckless, perhaps somewhat foolish courage that rode with the great Jimmy Collins across that patch of sky where Death touched him with a bony hand. But was Jimmy Collins so foolish? Is it not true that today aircraft is safer and sounder than it was before he gave his life to progress and high adventure? Are the deeds of Rickenbacker, of Bishop, and of our gallant foeman, the German Richtofen, all in vain? We think not. We believe, instead, that the laughter of Richtofen still rolls like happy thunder across the heavens. Did Lindbergh fly in vain? It would be absurd to assume so. The gallant Acosta, whose erratic but thrilling wings have soared through a thousand mad adventures—should he be forgotten? We don't think so. Not while adventure, courage and skill are part of the human tradition!

We would like these men to be remembered. We wish that there might be a vast and silent BUZZARD BATTALION who will not forget. It is for that purpose that these words are written. The rest remains up to the readers who most admire the great and eternal Spirit of the Skies.

To THE BUZZARD BATTALION
205 East 42 Street
New York City

Please send me my wings as a full-fledged member of THE BUZZARD BATTALION. I am enclosing 25 cents to cover costs and mailing charges.

NAME

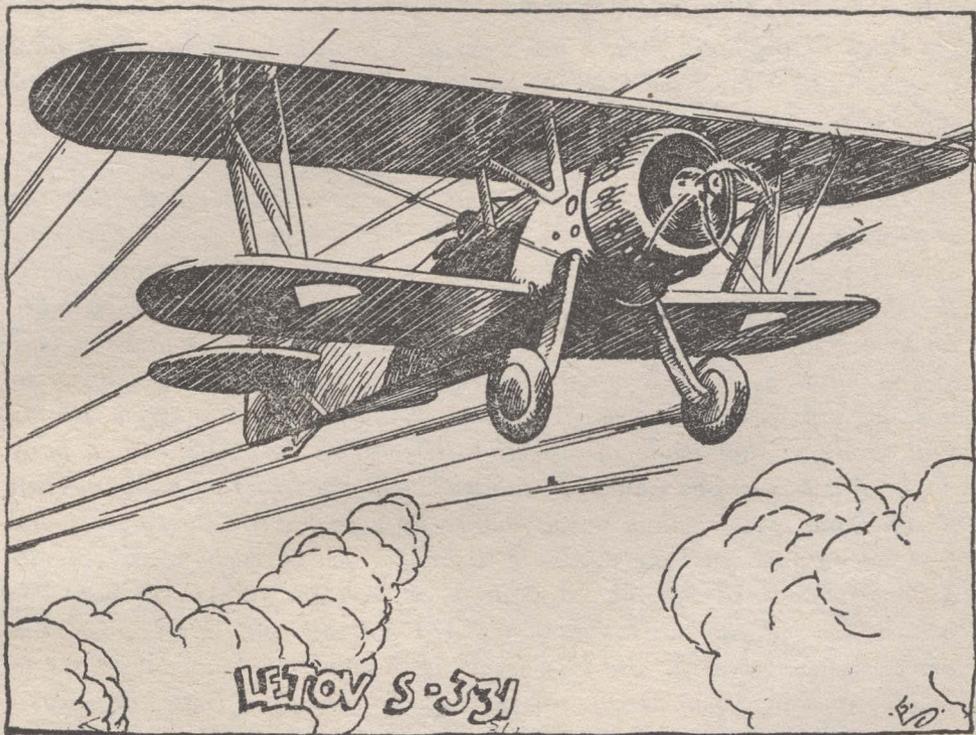
ADDRESS

.....

Because we wish THE BUZZARD BATTALION to grow, and its members to have some sign of membership, we are providing, at cost price, sterling silver wings that may be worn to assure full membership in this club. All are eligible; we ask only your fidelity to Aviation!

SKY SECRETS

BY GEORGE EVANS



CZECHOSLOVAKIA, though seldom found in air-strength listings, has a number of surprisingly efficient military planes. Take the Letov S-331 illustrated as an example, and remember, as you read the data below, that she is a *service* ship; not an experimental type.

She uses the 920 H. P. Gnome-Rhone 14 Kdrs. engine, cowled, and equipped with a three-bladed propeller of controllable pitch. An exhaust collector is fitted to the engine and carries the exhaust gases to a point low on the left hand side (from the cockpit) to be expelled.

The wings are of unequal span, staggered, and braced by a single bay of metal 'N' struts, wiring, and metal 'N' cabane struts. The lower wings carry "Frise" type ailerons, and four Vickers machine guns.

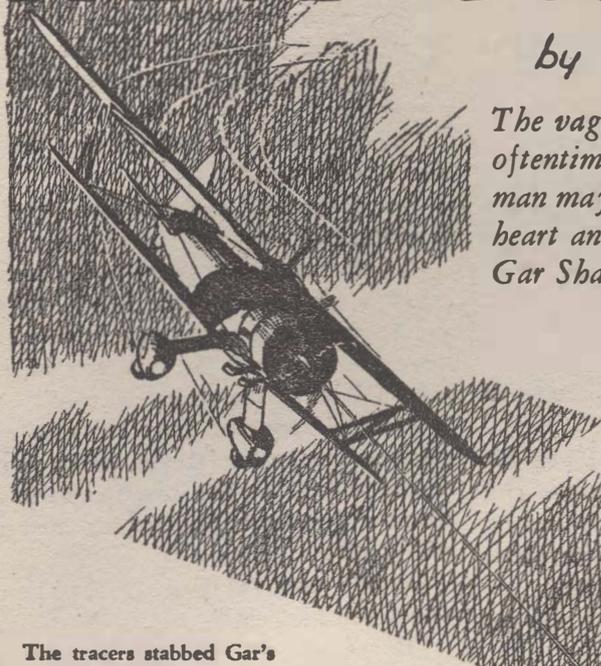
The fuselage appears to be metal as far back as the pit, and from there on, back to and including the tail surfaces, it is covered with fabric. The rudder is balanced; the wheels are carried on pylon type struts into which are fitted the shock absorbers. The cockpit carries the usual instruments.

Specifications are: Span: 33 feet; length: 25 feet 9 inches; height: 9 feet 10 inches. Empty weight is 3190 pounds, while a payload of 1100 pounds may be carried. Speed is 251 m. p. h., and it can reach an altitude of 16,400 feet in a trifle over six minutes.

HELL ON ICE

by O. B. MYERS

The vagaries of Fate are many, and oftentimes its course is blind. But a man may trick the gods of war if his heart and faith are strong as steel! Gar Shaler played a gory game—and won!



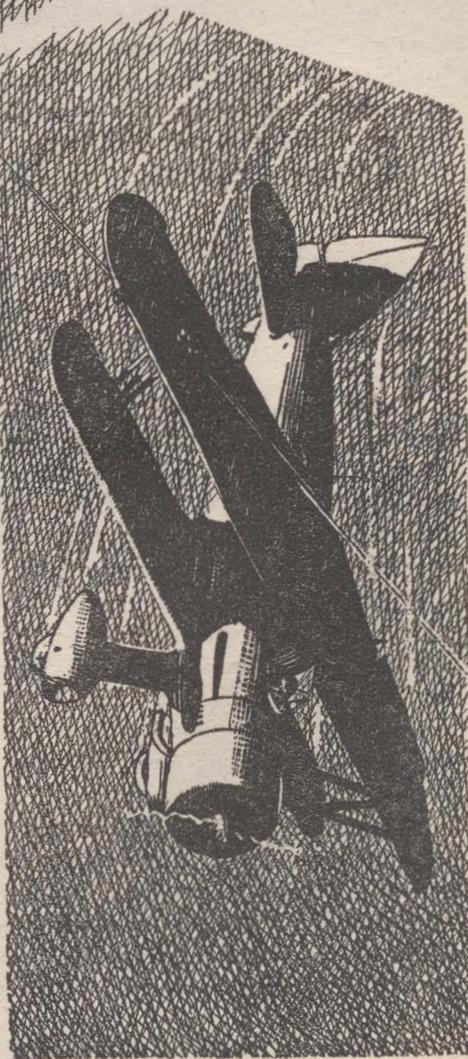
The tracers stabbed Gar's wing-tip.

PASSING over Trenton, Gar Shaler was moved by an idle impulse. He was in no hurry, but he reached out and pulled the throttle wide. The roar of the big 14-cylinder Titan deepened as it developed its full 1200 horsepower. The air-speed meter climbed the scale in little jerks; 290, 300, 310, 320. One more twitch, and it hung motionless.

Gar nodded, smiling. What a sweet ship! Turned out in the spring of 1940 by the Hi-Fleet company as a special test job, it was unquestionably the fastest thing of its size in the States.

"You want to advertise Gamma Gas, don't you?" he'd said to Steve Westley, Vag-Oil manager. "Then everything I do in this ship must attract the public eye. I've got to fly faster, farther, higher than anyone else. I've got to make the front pages every time I go up."

"Don't worry about the front-page assignments," Steve had grinned. "We stand pretty well in Washington, and



we'll wangle stunts with publicity value, all right."

Gar leaned forward to peer down, then eased the throttle back again. Ten minutes after passing Trenton, the skyscrapers of Manhattan were in front of him. Curving right over the East River bridges, he picked up North Beach airport ahead, with the ramps and stages used by the transatlantic flying boats from London along the water's edge. Picking up his short-wave transmitter, he got a clearance from the control tower, and rolled his wheels in the center of Runway Two.

A man came out of a hangar wiping his hands. He was of medium height and stockily built; though his face looked no more than forty, his hair was quite white, and he walked with a decided limp.

"Hello, Cutter," said Gar. "So you got it, eh?"

"Sure," replied the man in overalls. "As soon as I told them about you, they put my name on the payroll. Sixty bucks a week, day shift. I'm much obliged, Mr. Shaler."

"Don't be thinking me," retorted Gar quickly. "I owe you a lot more than a recommendation for a job. And where do you get that Mr. Shaler stuff? You didn't call me Mr. Shaler when you were teaching me dual control, five years ago."

"Didn't I?" grinned Cutter Falk. "Maybe I forgot myself, once or twice, and used some of those words I picked up in France, back in '18. Speaking of France," he looked around sharply, "how do things look to you, Gar? We going to have war?"

"I hope not," said Gar fervently. "It all depends on Russia. I don't believe the present Moscow government wants to start anything. But if the Black Bear, leader of the Bolshoi, gets control away from Stalin, Europe will be a battlefield within a month."

"A little war would hoist the price of

gas a lot wouldn't it?" Cutter asked.

"Of course," admitted Gar. "Just the same, I prefer peace. I saw enough in Spain, in 1937, to sicken me of war for a long time."

"By the way," asked Cutter, "how's that leg of yours?"

"Good as new," declared Gar, proving it with a kick step.

"I wish I could say the same for mine," said Cutter, shaking his head. "They won't give me a transport license any more; if it wasn't for this ground job here, I'd be on the rocks. You—"

Gar could see that the other man was going to get grateful again, so he interrupted to say, "By the way, I came in on Number Two tank. See that it's filled up, will you?"

Cutter's eyes twinkled. "What brand would you like, sir?"

"If you put in anything but Gamma, you lug, I'll fry your tonsils. And check the oil. VX Heavy, if she needs any."

Cutter snapped his fingers suddenly. "That reminds me. Come over here and I'll show you something." He led the way toward the open mouth of the next hangar. "Look there."

Gar said, "Ha!" briefly. The plane that stood there, facing out, was the twin of his own, except that the wings were green.

"I'd heard that Hi-Fleet built two of those, but I'd never seen the other one before. Who owns her, d'you know?"

Cutter couldn't tell him much. The ship had been flown in the day before, quite late; he had seen nothing of the pilot.

"A woman came out this morning—a girl," he corrected himself. "One of those who look like a million dollars in flying togs; a parlor pilot with a rich papa, I suppose. She had some dope about servicing written on a piece of paper, but when she told me to fill up with VM-40, I thought she was crazy. Can you imagine

—a light oil like that in July? When I asked a second time, she just looked at the paper and then told me please to carry out my instructions. So I did.”

“You think she’s the owner of the bus, Cutter?”

“I wouldn’t know about that. She was around again a while ago, but she didn’t go up. In fact—” Cutter turned, then said quickly, “Look, there she goes now.”

Gar followed the other man’s glance, but all he saw was a back. A girl in white, with very dark hair under a tight-fitting little hat, was just climbing into a taxi at the edge of the ramp. As the cab whirled off, she was leaning forward, and he could not see her face.

At that moment he heard someone calling his name.

“Mr. Shaler! You’re wanted on the telephone!”

Gar started toward the man in the door of the administration building. “Are you sure? No one even knows I’m here, yet.”

“Just the same, there’s a call here for you.”

Gar said to Cutter, “See you later,” and strode toward the office. Inside, an operator waved him toward a single booth under the stairs; he entered it, closed the folding door, and reached for the receiver. But his hand paused in mid-air, as he sniffed appreciatively. He thought, “That’s an unusual perfume.” The close, warm air inside the booth was fragrant with an exotic aroma, heady rather than sweet, which he was sure he had never smelled before.

He shrugged and picked the receiver off the hook. “Yes?”

“Gar Shaler?” said a booming voice. “How’s your knee?”

“My knee? What do you mean? Who is this?”

THE unseen voice disregarded his questions. “The old Farman hit the wall at an angle, and flopped over. When

the motor tore loose, it came down on your leg. A hot exhaust flange had set fire to your breeches; I had to beat out the flames first, before I could—”

“Tim!” cried Gar in amazement. “It’s you? But of course; who else in the world would know all that! Where the devil are you? And how did you know I was here?”

A bellowing laugh made the receiver squawk. “Timarovitch Drov, yes. As you say, who else? But you are as full of questions as a dog is of fleas. How did I know you were there? It is very simple. I am sitting in the office of a friend, on the 54th floor of the National Building, let us say. I look out of the window, and what do I see? Even if the big letters did not say ‘Gamma Gas’, I would know those silver wings if I never looked at the newspapers. I watch for a minute, to see which direction you are heading; the rest is easy.”

“Clever lad, Tim! But where have you been for the last four years? When are you going to tell me what you’ve been doing?”

“When you have dinner with me, tonight,” was the reply.

“Tonight?”

There was hesitation in Gar’s tone; perhaps he was remembering the long winter nights of 1936 in the cafés of Madrid, when the giant bearded Russian was always the last to rise from the table, yet always the first to appear on the drome at dawn.

“Don’t be startled,” laughed Timarovitch Drov, reading his thoughts. “This is not Madrid, my friend; this is New York, where we both have other things to think of besides drinking, eh?”

“Okay, Tim. Where shall I meet you?”

“I am busy, for a little while. But if you will be standing with your arms folded by the side entrance of the Coronet Club in an hour, my sister will meet you and bring you to me.”

That, thought Gar, sounded like Tim. Always doing things in the roundabout, mysterious manner. But he merely said, "All right, Tim. I'll be there," and hung up.

Emerging from the booth, he paused to buy an evening paper; then he walked directly to the ramp and stepped into a taxi. He opened up the news sheet, ran his eyes over the headlines, and settled on a long article under the heading, 'Washington, D.C., July 16th, 1940.' It was ominously vague, as were all political dispatches these days. Europe was a cauldron with the lid clamped tight; the slightest mismove might precipitate a holocaust. Russia was the source of suspense where every eye watched, and every hand waited the next move of the Black Bear, that invisible plotter and renegade whose ambition was a world revolution. The impending visit of a special envoy from Moscow to Washington, the dispatch said, would clarify the situation somewhat by confirming Stalin's peaceful intentions. This envoy was reported to be even now en route.

Turning the pages, he noted a short paragraph under 'Marine News.' *The regular west-bound transatlantic flight from London reached Botwood Harbor on time, at 3:00 P.M. today. The same plane took off after refueling for Shediac, where the schedule calls for a twenty minute halt to transfer passengers for Montreal. It is expected to reach New York on schedule at 9:00 P.M. this evening.*

He smiled faintly. The State Department was exercising unusual discretion. Even should anyone read those two articles side by side, there was not a word to suggest putting two and two together.

At precisely six-thirty he was standing in 55th Street, just east of Park Avenue, when a taxi swerved sharply to the curb and a feminine hand beckoned from the window. He approached the cab.

"You are Tim's sister?" he asked, open-

ing the car door and stepping in.

She nodded, but did not speak until he had entered the cab and the driver had turned the corner. "Gar Shaler," she said softly. "Tim has told me much about you. Gar—I like that name."

He looked at her with a puzzled frown. Whereas Tim's hair and beard were a deep red, her locks were black as jet, wrapped in smooth coils about her small head. She was a typical Slav beauty, with deep brown eyes as big as saucers and a full red mouth like a child. Her smile was something to dazzle a king, but it wasn't her looks that puzzled Gar. He couldn't decide what it was.

"I'm sure we've never met before," he said. "But am I wrong? There's something about you that seems familiar; I don't know—"

She shook her head. "I have only been in this country a little time. You must excuse the poor way I speak, please."

Suddenly it dawned on him. It was not her appearance that provoked his memory; it was her perfume. The interior of the cab was redolent with that same elusive aroma that had tickled his nostrils once before—in the phone booth at the airport. He opened his mouth to ask a question, but then closed it abruptly.

"You were going to say?" she encouraged him.

"I was going to say that your accent is just enough to add charm to your conversation. I hope I hear a lot of it."

Without dropping her eyes, she said pointedly, "Perhaps that can be arranged, if you like."

But Gar was on his guard now, though for what reason he could not have said. Perhaps it was merely his conviction, rooted in experience, that women as beautiful as this were dangerous. He shifted the conversation to impersonal ground by speaking of Tim, and was still in an anecdote of the days of the *Columna Internazionale* when the cab came to a jolting

stop on the west side of First Avenue.

He glanced with some surprise at the grimy windows of a tiny café, two steps below sidewalk level, where a few signs in English were repeated in Russian; he was thinking of Tim's taste for caviar and juicy roasts. But he said nothing as the girl led him in along a side corridor from which a couple of doors opened into the half-filled bar. At the rear end of the hallway, a worn staircase spiralled upward around an elevator shaft in which stood an old style, hand-operated cage.

Coming in from the sunlit street, he could see little of the two men who stood there, but they must have been able to see him very plainly. The girl said something in Russian, in a sharp tone which she had not used before. At once one of the men stepped into the elevator, and when they had followed, tugged lustily at the steel cable.

They rose in silence past two closed doors, and stopped at the third with a jerk. When the door of the lift opened, the atmosphere seemed to undergo a sudden change. The corridor here was thickly carpeted and lighted only by dim bulbs in wall brackets, for the only window had been blanked out with black paint. There was a faint smell of cooking in the air; a waiter in a spotless tuxedo bowed to them from an open doorway.

"Gar—my old comrade!" boomed the stentorian voice of Timarovitch Drov. "Come here; I am hungry to see you!"

There were three round tables in the room, but two of them had been pushed back into the corners. The third was set with immaculate linen, gleaming silver, and a dozen crowded trays of assorted *hors d'oeuvres* as well as several bottles of wine.

THE gigantic paw of the Russian enclosed Gar's hand, and Gar, who was no weakling, felt his bones cracking. He saw that Tim's close-cropped hair was

still the same fiery crimson, but that he had shaved off his beard; the unusual breadth of his jaw and his high cheekbones made his eyes seem small. Though he must have weighed over two hundred and fifty pounds, he was not fat; his arms and legs were solidly muscled, and he had the flat stomach of an athlete in rigid training.

Tim grinned from ear to ear like a boy and talked continually. He gave Gar no chance to answer one question before he asked another. He completely ignored the girl, who, however, showed no annoyance at all; she was apparently accustomed to his boisterous manners. Flicking the cork from a bottle with his thumb, he filled the glasses, and attacked a plate of caviar with only a table knife for a weapon. Gar remarked with a twinkle in his eye,

"Now I see why you got rid of that beard."

Tim's laughter made the floor shake. He seemed to be in a very jolly mood; he joked, ate as if just ending a ten day fast, and was amused by every remark Gar made. No one could possibly have resembled less a man with important matters on his mind. But when they had finished the third course and the waiter had left the room, Tim's smile vanished abruptly, and he leaned across the table.

"Gar, I know you. You know me. We are both what you call soldiers of fortune, yes? So tell me: how is your fortune?"

Gar tilted back in his chair. "Why, I'm doing all right, Tim. Got a nice job with Vag-Oil, plenty of flying—"

"Bah! A job! What is that, for a man like you? Business, yes. But not a job. What kind of excitement is that?"

"I get along nicely without the excitement, Tim."

The Russian looked at him reproachfully. "No, no, Gar, my friend. You talk like that but you do not mean it. You did not fly in Spain with the *Columna*

Internacional to get away from excitement. You are like me; the war fever is in your blood. When the war starts you will be in the thick of it, like the last time. I know you better."

Gar's eyes hardened. "Is a war going to start, Tim?"

The Russian shrugged vehemently. "We soldiers of fortune, we do not start the wars, Gar. We are the ones who finish them—unless they finish us. All we must ask is to be on the side that pays the highest bonuses. That is right, yes?"

Gar sensed that he was being subtly sounded out; he noticed that the girl, who had hardly spoken a word, was watching him closely. He thought carefully before he spoke.

"I'd rather not see another war, Tim. I'm not anxious to go around killing my friends—or anyone else."

Tim regarded him almost with disgust. "But you are foolish! You allow sentiment to spoil good sense! That is a great mistake. What difference does it make, if your friends will be killed anyway? Look, Gar. I am your friend; you like me. Once I saved your life, yes? Good! But now, perhaps, in carrying out a certain piece of business you find me in your way. What will you do? You will push me aside. If necessary, you will kill me—if the business is big enough. Right?"

Gar said slowly, "You think I'd do that, Tim?"

"But certainly!" cried the Russian. "To be kind and sentimental is a pleasure, but business comes before pleasure, always, yes?"

Again Gar tried to sense the meaning behind this talk. "I don't know what you're driving at Tim. But something tells me we're miles apart. If that's the way you figure me—"

For just a moment the atmosphere in the room was strained and tense. The Russian stared at Gar searchingly, while the girl exhaled a slow lungful of gray

smoke in silence. Then Tim abruptly assumed his good nature again, as a man might don a mask. He waved his hand.

"But it is I who am the fool! All this talk of wars and killing, when we are here to dine together. Come, let us open another bottle."

He called loudly for the waiter, who spoke to Tim in Russian. Then he tossed his napkin onto the table.

"Excuse me, Gar. There is a man downstairs who wishes to speak to me. I'll only be a moment."

The door closed behind him to open again when the waiter returned with the champagne. Gar only touched the glass to his lips, and tried to make light conversation with the woman, but she seemed ill at ease and answered him in monosyllables. When Tim did not come back after several minutes, Gar glanced at his watch.

"I'll have to be leaving soon," he remarked.

She stared at him in what struck him as exaggerated dismay.

"You must go? Oh, but that is sad! I shall tell Tim, so that he can speak with you again before you leave."

She rose and left the room; the door thumped softly behind her as she passed into the corridor. Gar leaned back in his chair and lighted a cigarette. He finished that cigarette and lighted another one. No one came into the room; neither Tim, nor the girl; not even the waiter. The champagne went flat in his glass.

He looked again at his watch. It was eight o'clock. He decided to wait no more than five minutes. But before five minutes were past, he was convinced that something was not quite right. It was too quiet; the very air seemed to be waiting, with him. For what?

He rose to his feet, instinctively moving on tip-toe. Gliding noiselessly across to the door, he put his ear close to the panel. He could hear nothing except a distant rumble of traffic. He told himself that his

imagination was too active, and raised a hand toward the knob.

But he halted without touching it. No sound came through that door, but he caught a sudden whiff of unmistakable perfume. Very plain and close, as if the girl were right at his elbow. Instantly he was certain that she was standing right there in the corridor, had been standing there all the time. Why?

Retreating as softly as he had come, he looked about him. The room had only the one door and a window that opened on a rear court. Humming a tune loud enough for her to hear, he raised the sash cautiously. Three floors down to a concrete area, and not a hand-hold anywhere in sight. But when he leaned out and looked up he saw a window directly above that stood partly open.

He studied the distances carefully for a moment, knowing that a miscalculation meant a fatal fall. Then he went back to the table and rattled a fork on his plate, humming distinctly. When he next crossed to the window, he didn't hesitate. Slipping through backwards, he used his elbows against the sides of the window frame to keep his balance while he slowly stood erect on the outer sill. By stretching to the limit he could just reach an iron bracket that had once supported a shutter. It took all the strength of his arms to lift himself, but then he had his fingers crooked over the sill of the window above. Another straining moment and he was lying on his stomach in the upper window, his head inside in utter darkness.

He was in a hurry, and could not wait for his eyes to adjust themselves, but he had to pause for a moment to control his bursting lungs. Then he clambered in across a cot that creaked deafeningly and felt his way past a table and a chair. The door, as he guessed, was in the same relative position as the one on the floor below, and as he slipped out into an uncar-

peted passage, he palmed his automatic.

In these old buildings one floor was just like another; he found the staircase that turned behind the elevator shaft, and met a glow of light from below. He crept down on his toes in throbbing silence until he could see along the next passage. Then he stiffened.

The beautiful woman stood there outside the door of that private dining room, facing the knob—her back to the stairs. Her head was poised on one side, alert, and in her right hand was a blued-steel revolver. Gar nodded to himself; yes, she was certainly dangerous, that girl. Only after he had glided noiselessly halfway down the next flight did he draw a full breath.

The next two floors were deserted, and he breathed easier. But he had forgotten the two men by the elevator. They were still standing there and he could not avoid killing one of them. There was no possibility of strolling past unseen, and when the first one went for his hip pocket Gar fired. The booming echo was still in the narrow hall when he felled the second with a lightning left and leaped over his falling form. A clatter of alarm came out of the bar, but Gar sprinted to the entrance and dashed into the street.

He was smart enough not to jump into the taxi that waited there by the curb, but whirled round the corner into the side street and caught another one already in motion.

"North Beach Airport—fast!" he panted, as he leaped in.

HIS watch told him that he had enough time but he was nevertheless anxious; he had a feeling that the schedule had been altered. It wasn't until much later that he learned his hunch was right; the London airliner had omitted the usual landing at Shediac, and thus reached New York a full twenty minutes ahead of time.

As his taxi raced along the airport

road he could see the lights ahead, and knew that the big flying boat was down and tying up to the landing stage. But he could also see that the floodlights were lighted, on the field itself, and that a land plane had either just come down or was about to take off. He rubbed his eyes, then cursed the taxi's slowness. No, that wasn't his Hi-Fleet—but the only difference was in the color.

The cab slewed to a halt on the ramp. Tossing the driver a bill, Gar leaped out and was running.

And as his foot touched the ground, the first shot rang out.

It was two hundred yards along the bulkhead to the steps that rose from the landing stage, and the glare of the field lights was in his eyes. Yet strangely enough Gar, running at top speed, had a clearer idea afterward of what happened than those who were in the midst of it. He saw the green-winged Hi-Fleet standing close to the edge of the field, its propeller glinting as the motor turned over lazily. He saw the little knot of figures moving up the gangway from the recently arrived air liner; passengers, stewards, officers, and others.

It was in that group that the shooting began. He could not definitely place the first shot, but it was immediately followed by more, the flashes making little crimson flecks against the dark background of the bay, the detonations cracking out angrily. He saw one man fall, then another; then the whole group went down as if mowed by a scythe, those who were not hit dropping flat to dodge the barrage.

One figure was still erect, and running swiftly. Without definitely recognizing him, Gar could see that it was an exceptionally large man, who nevertheless ran like a deer. His suspicions were crystallizing, and he tugged his own gun from his pocket. But he was still too far to hit anything with an automatic. He sprinted desperately.

He was still fifty yards away when the 14-cylinder Titan roared like a waking monster. The plane began to move as the running figure reached the side and chucked something in the open cabin door. The big man leaped on the step and was half in the cabin when the ship began to swing in a half circle. Another man, evidently a mechanic, was clinging to a wing-tip in a desperate attempt to prevent a take-off.

Gar shouted, and changed his course. But the figure in the cabin door twisted around and there was another savage bark. The man at the wing-tip folded up in a heap, and the plane straightened out, gaining speed. Gar, who had guessed plenty by now, emptied his revolver after it. But the ship rolled at a fast pace off across the field and lifted its wheels just as it went out of range of the floodlights.

The terror-stricken group was beginning to come to its feet, but Gar ran first toward the sprawled figure on the field. As he turned the limp body over, he swore bitterly. It was Cutter Falk.

"Cutter! Where'd he get you? We'll fix you up—"

The bubbling hole in the very center of Cutter's chest made pretense useless. He spat bloody froth, moving his lips feebly. Gar could see that he was trying to say something.

"What is it, Cutter? Did you see who it was?"

There was death in the old pilot's eyes, hovering close, but he struggled to speak. "Big—red-head. . ." he gasped. "Just—"

He got no farther. The blood, welling up in his throat, brought on a paroxysm of coughing. When it ended he was unconscious.

Gar rose to his feet. The airport manager, holding a shattered forearm with the other hand, ran over from the gangway.

"What happened?" demanded Gar. "The passenger from Russia—"

"Dead as a stone," was the reply. "They

got him first. What a mess this is!"

"They?" questioned Gar. "There was more than one?"

The manager nodded grimly. "One of them is back there, with a bullet through his heart. The big fellow got away. Come over and look."

The thunder of the departing exhausts was fading away overhead as the plane melted into the night. Over by the bulkhead four figures lay on the ground. One was an Englishman, a passenger from London; his knee was shattered, and he was cursing hysterically in pain. Near him was huddled a Secret Service operative, from Washington, moaning softly. He had taken three bullets through the belly, and wasn't going to last long. The bearded man who lay with arms flung wide was evidently M. Stakhilai, the envoy from Moscow; a slug through his skull had dealt him a quick and painless death. The fourth man had the high cheekbones and saffron complexion of a Mongol; his features were still stiff, frozen in a leer of hatred and ferocity.

Gar pointed at the bearded man. "Did he have a bag?"

"He was carrying a portfolio of some kind," nodded the manager. "That was what the big man grabbed, the first thing."

Gar nodded, staring grimly at the scene of slaughter. He was adding up facts in his mind, beginning to understand the significance of what had taken place. Sometimes, he perceived, too elaborate precautions were worse than none. No information had been made public on the coming of this special ambassador from Russia; yet there he lay, murdered, his papers gone, thus precipitating a world crisis.

No blame could attach itself to Gar. His instructions from the State Department had been explicit but brief. He had merely been ordered to meet a passenger named Stakhilai arriving at 9:00 P.M., and fly him direct to Washington, with-

out mentioning his orders to anyone. The change in schedule of the air liner, of which he had not been told, was the detail that had upset everything.

Suddenly he remembered the waiter coming in and speaking to Tim in Russian. That was it, of course; there must have been a report radioed that the ship had passed Shediac without landing. There was no doubt in his mind now that Tim was allied with the Bolshoi element, whose far-flung legions were striving to oust the peaceful Stalin and plunge the world into a maelstrom of war. And this was unquestionably the stroke that would achieve their brutal purpose.

He watched gloomily while airport attendants lifted the wounded onto stretchers, and thought to himself, "It's too late. He's got the papers, a ship that is capable of more than three hundred miles an hour, and no one can even guess which way he's heading."

But then his glance fell on the corpse of Cutter Falk, sprawled in the glare of the field lights. The old pilot's mouth was open, as if he were trying to tell Gar something, and suddenly Gar gave a violent start. Cutter *had* told him something! At the time it had seemed meaningless, but now it took on significance.

"My ship!" roared Gar. "Start up my motor, quick!"

The field manager, white-faced and flustered, stared at him in amazement. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going after him," snapped Gar, running toward the hangars.

His plane stood in the open, where he had left it that afternoon. On the control stick was tied a little tag, on which he recognized Cutter's handwriting. It said, "Gas, oil okay. C.D.F."

Lashed by his commands, the mechanics hurried as much as they could. Gar warmed the big motor only enough to make sure it was hitting evenly, then signalled his readiness to take off. At the

last moment he leaned from the cabin window to shout at the manager.

"Tell Washington to keep their shirts on!" he bellowed, and eased the throttle open. The big ship shuddered forward.

C LIMBING straight across Flushing Bay, he curved left over the water until his compass needle read due north. The crowded streets of the Bronx flashed past beneath, then Yonkers; then, as he paralleled the Hudson, Peekskill and Poughkeepsie. He was levelled off now at five thousand feet, but still on full throttle; the air speed meter hovered just above three hundred. He settled down for a long grind.

His eyes were thoughtful, his jaws grim. If he was wrong, he would probably never come back. After all, it was a slim clue, that remark of Cutter's about the other Hi-Fleet being filled with VM-40, a light oil. But no one ever used a light oil like that except in cold weather. Knowing that, Gar had remembered the North Pole Station of the Russians. First established in 1937, it had been built into a regular base, and was in the hands of the military party. Many of that party were Bolshoi at heart, waiting and hoping for another revolution that would surpass in murder and pillage the one of 1917. Gar was gambling everything on the guess that Tim was pointed for the Pole.

An hour brought him over Montreal. He thought of landing and asking if a plane had been seen or heard, ahead of him, but discarded the idea as a waste of time. But he did throttle back to 275, as another scheme formed in his mind. The other Hi-Fleet was doubtless travelling at cruising speed. He had left the ground a half an hour behind it, but he did not want to overtake it before dawn.

Holding the course due north, he droned on and on through the night. The mid-July weather of New York turned gradually to biting cold. The bleak hills

of Quebec were patched with snow, the rivers below him edged with ice. He closed the cabin windows and turned on the heater; even so, he shivered in his light clothes.

It was after midnight when he began to experiment with the McCarn collision-warner. This device, developed in 1939, was a cross between a radio direction-finder and the sounding equipment long used on steamships. If there was another plane in the air, it could be detected, and its direction determined, night or day.

For some time he got no results. Then at last he heard a buzz in the ear-phones, very faint, but distinguishable. Noting the setting, he changed his course by a few degrees and inched the throttle a little wider. As the minutes passed, the buzz grew plainer. A smile of satisfaction creased his face.

After an hour the buzz became so loud that he had to tune it down. He estimated that he was within five miles of that other ship, and he was certain that it was the plane he was after. Who else would be flying up here, nearly to the Arctic Circle, heading north? He throttled down again, flying just fast enough to keep the sound constant in his ears, and waited for dawn.

He crossed a body of water which he knew from the map must be Hudson Strait; then he was crossing the barren, icy wastes of Baffin Land. His watch said three-thirty in the morning; the sky was beginning to get lighter. He could see a shore line beneath him; on the right were rocky ridges and snow-filled valleys, on the left a vast sea choked with ice floes, stretching as far as he could see. The air was frosty, bitter cold and clear. The stars were fading, as suddenly he caught sight of a speck against the vague horizon.

Instantly he jerked his throttle wide open. The speck began to grow. In a few minutes he was able to identify it posi-

tively; it was the green-winged Hi-Fleet. Mile by mile he crept up closer and closer, until he was hard on its flank. Then abruptly he skidded right, swooped to its side, and waggled his wings commandingly.

He was so close that he could see the incredulous amazement on the two faces that peered out from the cabin windows. And no wonder they were astonished; nothing could have been farther from their expectations than to see another plane in this icy Arctic sky. But he saw their surprise quickly give way to anger and dismay when he made an unmistakable gesture toward the south.

Gar repeated the gesture. He saw Tim plainly now; the Russian shook his head, and then shook his fist. The green-winged ship held straight on its course to the north.

Gar reached down and twisted a lever. There was a high-velocity Browning gun mounted under the cowl; he had never used it except for target practice at Fort McHenry. But like everything else on that plane, it was always in working order. He curved off to the left, swung back again at an angle, and squeezed the trigger grips. A handful of smoking tracers seared a path across the nose of Tim's ship.

The reaction was instantaneous, and it was Gar's turn to be surprised. That other ship was also equipped with a machine gun, and the pilot lost no time in putting it into action. Moreover, he fired not to warn but to destroy. The blast of tracers stabbed Gar's right wing-tip as he hastily threw his plane into a bank.

Gar groaned aloud. "Damn it, Tim! Must I kill you?"

Hoping against hope, he tried once more to gesture a command to turn back. But a second time he was met by a burst of hot steel that left no doubt about the intentions of the other ship's occupants. To those pirates with their booty there

was no longer such a thing as compromise. They had to get away clean, or die trying. Gar ground his teeth.

The Hi-Fleet was quite different from the pursuit plane he had flown in Spain; bigger, faster, a quicker climber. But the principles of combat were the same, had always been the same since 1917. Get the other man in your sights, and then shoot to kill. There were no other rules, and never would be any others.

Gar hurled the ship through a series of back-breaking maneuvers that would have strained a Fonck or a Rickenbacker to follow. When he whipped out with his hand on the trigger, the other plane was off on his flank. Tim had always been an A-1 flyer, but weak on his aim. His sizzling volley merely grazed Gar's aileron, as Gar slipped away.

Gar knew that Tim was impatient, reckless by nature. The best strategy would be to wear him down, goad him until he made a slip. For nearly five minutes Gar never tried once to attack. He swooped and reeled and ducked, keeping always just out of the other man's range, yet always near enough to tantalize.

There came the moment when these tactics had their effect. Tim, boiling with rage and impatience, cast caution to the winds and charged like a mad bull. Deftly Gar swerved, wrenched his ship through a swift roll, and found himself sitting on his opponent's tail. His fingers squeezed, and the green-winged ship lurched hideously.

WITH horror gripping his throat, Gar watched it careen downward. For a thousand feet it spun crazily toward the ice. Just as he thought it was about to end in a flaming heap, however, the spin ceased and the plane shot out at a steep angle. But it was too late; half under control and half amok, it slewed sideways, touched its wheels, and bounced fifty feet in the air.

As it again settled drunkenly, one wing hit a hummock, and in the next instant it was a crushed and shapeless pile of wreckage. Wheeling overhead, Gar stared downward. For a long minute there was no sign of life. Then, very slowly, one figure crawled out onto the surface of the floe. At the sight of that flaming red head, Gar uttered a broken cry.

Even while his hands and feet were moving the controls, his better judgment told him he was crazy. He was a thousand miles from civilization; the slightest mishap would mean swift ruin. And what had he to gain? Nevertheless, down he went. At an altitude of two hundred feet he circled three times, choosing the spot. Then very carefully he set his wheels down in a flat three-point landing.

Tim was staggering toward him over the ice when he snapped open the cabin door; the air cut his face like a knife.

"Stop where you are, Tim! Don't come any closer."

The Russian stared in surprise at the gun in Gar's hand.

"What the hell did you come down for?" he demanded.

"I'm damned if I know," was Gar's reply. "To pay an old debt, I suppose. But what's that you've got in your hand?"

Tim gestured with the black leather brief case. "You know as well as I do. Mobilization assignments and present stations of the Stalin divisions. The most valuable little packet of papers in exist-

tence, no doubt. With this, Gar, we can be masters of the world. Forget those cursed sentiments of yours! Fly me north, and we will—"

"Save your breath, Tim. I'm flying south, and I'm taking you with me. But I'm not taking that portfolio. Too many chances of—er—accidents. You can take your choice, Tim. Drop it in that crack in the ice, and climb in here. Or hang on to it—and stay. Think fast."

The Russian regarded him with mingled wonder and dismay, as he might have regarded a boy who had suddenly turned into a man before his eyes. After a minute he started to walk slowly nearer. "Listen, Gar—"

"Hold it!" snapped Gar. "Another step, and I'll shoot!"

Tim halted abruptly. His jaw sagged. "By the gods, you mean it, don't you? You'd go off and leave me here to die, wouldn't you?"

"Certainly," said Gar unswervingly. "You told *me* as much last night during dinner. Don't you remember?"

The Russian gazed at him for another moment. Then his irrepressible good nature rose to the surface. He roared with laughter.

"Gar, my friend, you win! . . . Look—"

He took a few steps sideways to where a six-foot crack split the enormous sheet of ice. With no further hesitation he tossed the portfolio from him; there was a little splash, and it sank from sight.



G-8

**and His
BATTLE
ACES**

DROME OF THE DAMNED!

Where men fall like wheat before the scythe of Death—and blood flows like falling rain, one man alone is fit to face the scourge of raging ruin! G-8 takes up the battle where others flee in horror and in awe, and with his skill and with his courage faces the gaping jaws of Hell!

Robert J. Hogan relates another of those thrilling tales, told to him by G-8, the Master Spy. Don't miss the

January Issue

Out Dec. 1

"There! Now let me in and out of this cursed wind."

At once Gar pocketed the revolver. "Your comrade?" he asked.

"Dead before we hit. Your bullets riddled him in the air, and he tangled the controls . . . For God's sake, watch that crack, Gar!"

With Tim in the seat beside him, Gar lifted the Hi-Fleet neatly off the surface and swung her nose south. But after a few minutes he shifted his course several points to the east.

"I don't think there's enough gas to reach Montreal. We'll head for Botwood Harbor. That's the nearest supply I know of."

"What are you going to do with me, then?" grinned Tim.

"I'll be thinking about that," murmured Gar.

It was five hours later, and the gas gauge was drooping toward zero, when Gar circled the ship down toward the tiny field at the edge of that Newfoundland bay. He could see the big transatlantic flying boat, scheduled to depart for Ireland at nine, moored at the edge of the bulkhead, her props spinning idly. Settling in a gentle side-slip, he cut his switch and rolled his wheels on the half-frozen turf. Then in an instant everything went black as midnight.

When he recovered his senses, he was draped in his seat and an airport steward was dashing water in his face.

"You must have come off without breakfast, eh?" the man was saying. "Well, don't worry; your passenger made his connection okay."

"What's that?" cried Gar, sitting up.

"Why, yes. You flew him over from Montreal to catch the plane for London, didn't you? That's what he said. He made it by something under a half a minute. Told us to look after you, as he jumped aboard."

Gingerly rubbing a lump behind his right ear, Gar leaped to stare out of the cabin window. The plane for Europe was in the air, climbing swiftly into the haze to the eastward.

"Why, the devil!" growled Gar. "Wait till I get hold of him!"

"You want to reach him, sir?" asked the steward. "The liner can be contacted by radio, you know."

Gar shook his head, and grinned slowly. "No. He didn't have to sock me; I'd have turned him loose anyway. After all, the only thing of importance is what is lying at the bottom of the Arctic Ocean."

Seeing the attendant's blank look, Gar added, "Just lead me to a telephone, will you? I want to put in a call for Washington, D.C."

THE END



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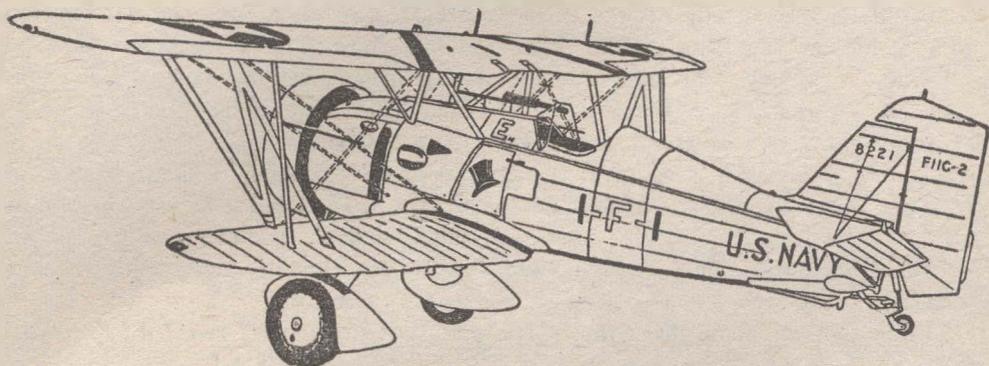
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ASEMBLIT

BY FREDERICK BLAKESLEE

SOLUTION OF "ASEMBLIT" N°6



WELL, gents, portrayed above, for those who are less adept with pencil and tracing paper than others, is last month's Asemblit. The top hat insignia and the 'U. S. Navy' on the fuselage were almost a dead giveaway, but I'll bet there were a couple of guys who didn't get it. I'd like to see some of the results you birds get!

And speaking of results, it might be a good idea to review the technique necessary for the completion of an Asemblit. Some of the new readers might not know what this is all about, so we'll give them a short course of instruction.

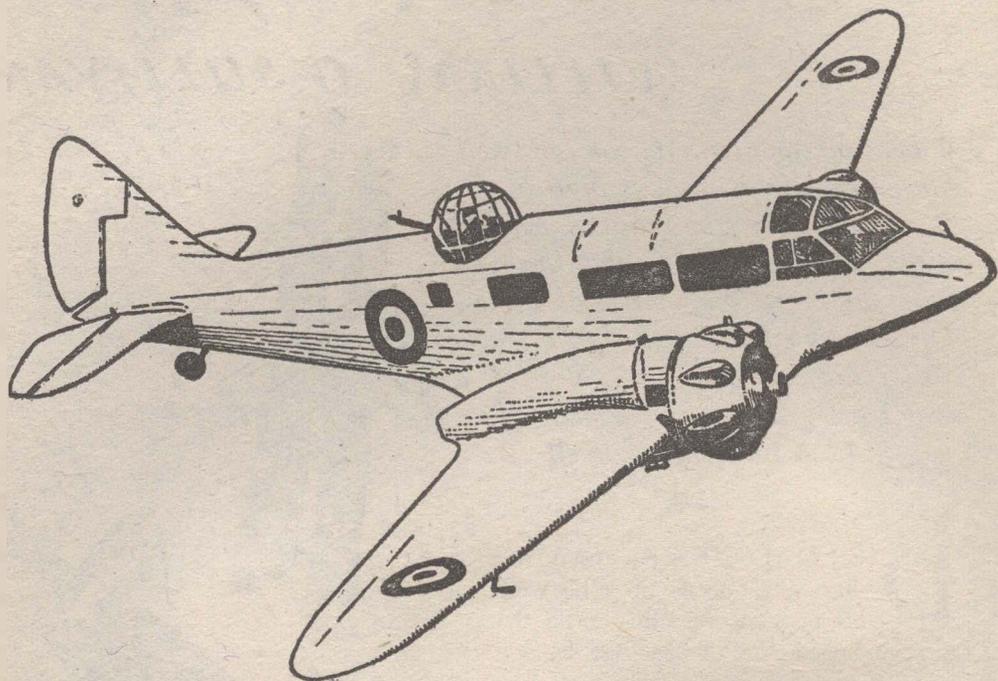
In the first place, all you need is a pencil, a bit of tracing paper, and the dining room table. On pages 88 and 89, you'll find a jumble of plane parts. The big idea is to assemble those parts into a picture of a complete ship. And here's the way to do it. Just put the tracing paper over the page, then draw in the parts. You'll notice that they are in great disorder. Well, pick one part which you recognize, then fit another familiar section under it, over it, or wherever you think it should go. It might be tough at first, but you'll get it if you're persistent.

Last month's plane, if there's any doubt about it, was a Curtiss Hawk F-11 C-2. It's a single-seat shipboard fighter with a Wright "Cyclone" engine. It has a maximum speed of 193 m. p. h. and an absolute ceiling of 26,700 feet.

We've had a lot of calls for more war-time planes, so this month we're giving you another to add to your collection. It's one of those tricky babies that gave some of the boys so much trouble, a "Camel". It's tricky, as I say, but I doubt that it will bother you as much as it did those chaps who had to fly it.

And next month the parade will go on. We're picking as our subject that crate which the French used so well and in such a deadly manner. I'm speaking of the graceful little Nieuport. See you then. Now turn to pages 88 and 89.

Story Behind the Cover



WE DON'T know who was responsible for the bit of military strategy displayed on the cover, but I don't think I'd want them on my side. Imagine placing heavy guns so close to a zep shed! Why, the shed would give away the location of the artillery battery, and the guns would reveal the resting place of the zep. It's all very screwy. But, seriously, we thought it would make a good cover, and there it is.

The big planes you see are an example of a very interesting trend which is becoming more popular every day. With commercial air transportation an established fact, and a spirit of unrest seeming to pervade our battered universe, plane designers are attempting to please everyone and cram the whole business into a nutshell. The result is the convertible plane.

One moment it's a real commercial ship, suitable for flying passengers or freight; within a few hours it has been transformed into a wicked fighting ship, capable of carting a heavy load of bombs at high speed. Now you see it, now you don't.

Germany has been playing this game for quite a while, but the crates on the cover are England's first attempt at this tricky bit of business, and they are a huge success. They are Airspeed Convertible "Envoys", and on the cover they are pictured as light bombers.

Think how amazingly fast the transformation can be performed. Four men can convert the "Envoy" from a commercial plane to a fighting ship in from four to eight hours! All they have to do is take out the seats and install an Armstrong-Whitworth gun turret. The bombing racks are already in place, and with a pilot, a wireless man, a bomber and a gunner, the ship is a deadly weapon. Two Siddeley "Cheetah" engines of 305 h. p. give it a speed of 210 m. p. h. and a ceiling of 24,000 feet.

And that means it can go places fast and do an awful lot of damage!

Fred Blakeslee.

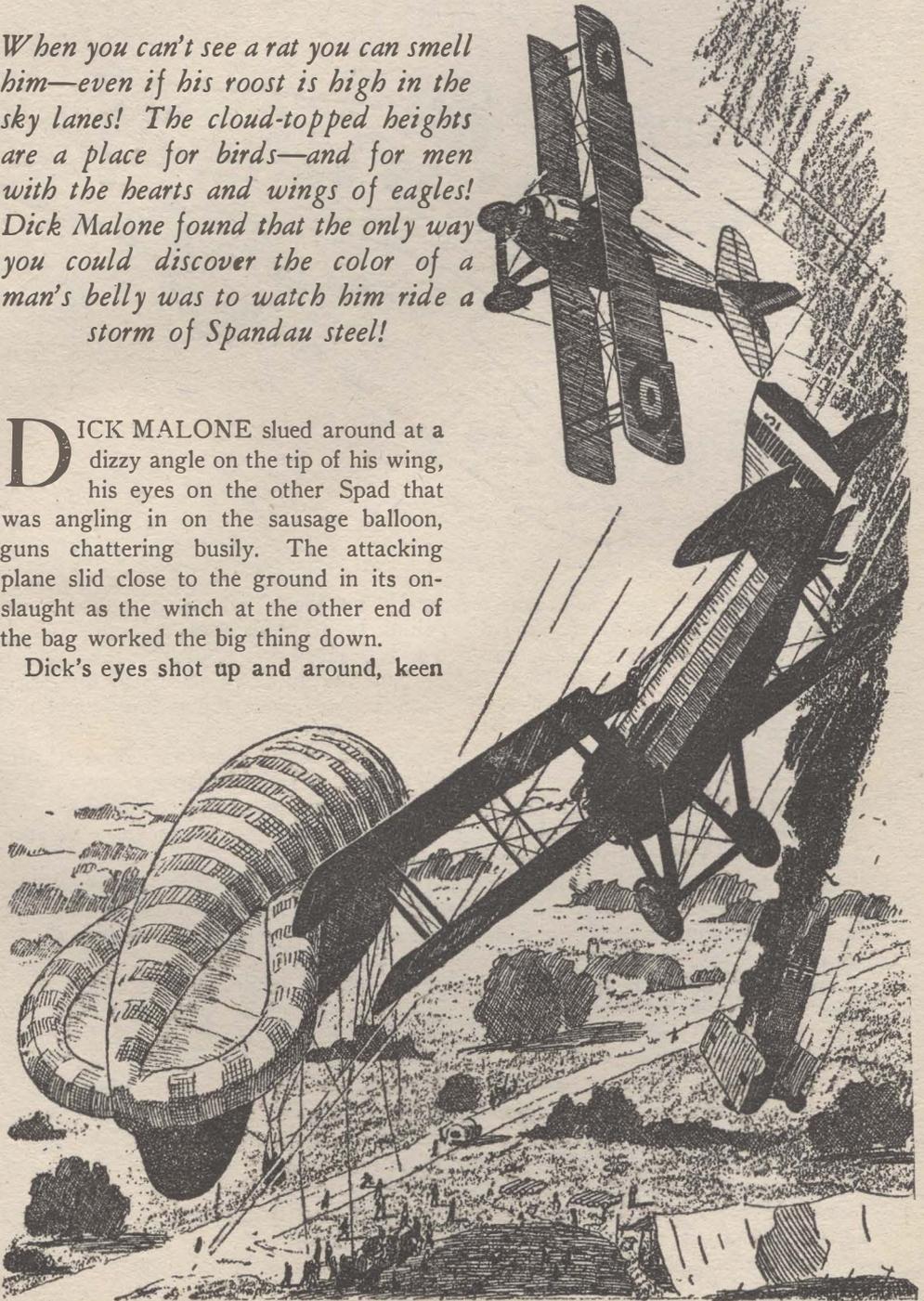
ACES HIGH

by WILLIAM O'SULLIVAN

When you can't see a rat you can smell him—even if his roost is high in the sky lanes! The cloud-topped heights are a place for birds—and for men with the hearts and wings of eagles! Dick Malone found that the only way you could discover the color of a man's belly was to watch him ride a storm of Spandau steel!

DICK MALONE slued around at a dizzy angle on the tip of his wing, his eyes on the other Spad that was angling in on the sausage balloon, guns chattering busily. The attacking plane slid close to the ground in its onslaught as the winch at the other end of the bag worked the big thing down.

Dick's eyes shot up and around, keen



and wise. He knew they didn't have much time, for the downing of that Fokker guarding the bag probably had been reported already. He stared down. The bag was still intact, that other Spad climbing up to attack.

"Missed him!" Dick growled. He shook his head in disbelief. "How could Lippy Murford miss a target that size?"

He stole another look at the skies overhead and pushed his crate into a power dive. Lower and lower the winch was working the bag. Time for one more attack only, at the outside, Dick saw. He remembered the courtesy of the air long enough to rip a warning *and* warning burst from his Vickers guns.

"That'll tell Murford I'm coming back in," he knew. He turned his attention to his target, noted with calm detachment the Archie that protested the attack with loud *whuffs* that burst around him, saw the ground crew that manned the rattling machine gun. He veered slightly to get clear of the close-creeping tracers.

His fingers were tight on the stick, nursed the gun trips coolly. Slowly, he closed down.

Suddenly a shadow eased between Dick Malone and the sun. Dick looked up, then veered wildly. Murford again! Throwing his Spad in for another go at it; throwing his Spad back in and not caring if he smashed into Dick or threw him out of stride, so long as he got another crack at the balloon.

For a split second, Dick was tempted to ride the man down or away, to hold his line and take his turn at it. But his efficient brain ticked off reasons why he shouldn't and his hands acted with sure instinct.

"Major Cressy wants this balloon," Dick's mind flashed. "Crashing Murford won't get it for us." He gave way to the other Spad's attack, his brain clicking on. "Might be better to work on that winch crew and slow them up. Might help Mur-

ford, too. We'll have a try at it."

He ruddered away, then back again, to come in at a tangent. His guns hammered past the bag and tore a line of holes steadily along the ground, past the Archie and machine gun crews, on towards the winch crew.

Rat-tat-tat-tat!

His ship pulsed to the hammer of the Vickers, and from nearby the hollow, racking chatter of Murford's guns came to him. Then there were others guns, far away at first but drawing near rapidly. Dick screwed his head around. With a sigh, he pulled up and climbed to meet the attack.

Two new Hun defenders were swarming down the skyway to take up the fight that had been lost by the solitary Fokker guard. Dick cursed Murford bitterly. They'd have had the bag and been gone by now, if Murford had kept his nose clean. The guy was a louse in spades. But Dick shrugged. He might have known something like this would happen.

WHEN Dick had hopped off from the tarmac of Forty-One Squadron, he had guessed reasonably well what to expect in this special mission flight. Although only 'Up Front' for three weeks, Dick had the savvy of an old head—especially when it came to Lippy Murford.

Dick, tall, dark-haired, dark-eyed, friendly as a puppy dog's tail, had run afoul of the suave and high-scoring Lippy Murford on his first flight.

On patrol duty high above the field, Major Cressy's pet seasoning spot, the rookie pilot was shuttling his plane up and down and attending strictly to his own business. He pulled away reasonably far when a returning large patrol—it was Murford's 'A' Flight—spilled out of the skies to the east and dropped for the tarmac.

One ship alone gunned alive again. It pulled level with Dick and raced on a

straight line for him. The nervous rookie banked away from the man, then came straight again—to find the Spad drilling straight for him. He twisted again, his eyes narrowing, and that other plane sliced to the right to keep him in line.

Dick stared, saw the distance between the ships close with lightning rapidity. He made one more try to clear, in case that other pilot hadn't seen him. He skidded flatly, his eyes ahead of him—and saw the other ship skid, too! He set his mouth in a grim line and rode blithely straight ahead.

Murford missed Dick by a matter of inches. The younger pilot looked up coolly for a brief second into the white face that passed only two feet above him. He raised a hand and wriggled five fingers derisively.

Murford was waiting for him when he slid to a landing a half hour later. Slender, blond, insolent-eyed, the man came over to where Dick was checking his ship into the hangar. He met Dick's glance with a hard stare, then flipped the short butt of his cigarette dangerously close to the rookie's head.

"Why didn't you get out of the way when you saw me up there?"

Dick's eyes appraised the man's expression, grew steely when he saw there was no humor, nothing of kidding, in this other's expression.

"Why don't you let me alone when you know I'm patrolling a post?" he asked simply.

Murford smirked, his eyes ranging around him on the group of mechanics and pilots who loafed nearby. He seemed to be inviting them to share the sport.

"Patrolling a post?" Murford's eyes widened in mock wonder. "Oh, Mister!—are you a flyer?"

Dick frowned. This was a new wrinkle to him. All his life, Dick Malone had worked hard at whatever he did, impelled by a driving desire to excel at anything he tried. All his life Dick Malone had

succeeded at success, had been a top in his studies, in athletics, in whatever he tried. But it had been sheer hard work that had turned the trick.

Now, with the War tossing Dick into the Army, the lad turned his attention to becoming a good pilot, a great shot, a famous ace. He was puzzled by Murford—wondered how a man could run up a score such as he had posted on the record books and still find time to clown around.

Dick met the man's provoking stare for a long minute. Then he shrugged. "I guess I didn't feel like moving." There was a glint of humor in his eyes when he said:

"You got out of *my* way, didn't you? What was the sense in both of us being bothered?"

Some of the crew gathered around laughed. Murford's face flushed, and he closed his hands into fists and came closer. "Pretty smart for a rookie, aren't you?"

Dick's eyes narrowed to slits. He wiped his hands carefully on his Sidcott suit, his face stony. "Smart enough to know my way around," Dick told him. "And smart enough to keep my mouth shut unless I can back it up with my hands."

There was a murmur of excitement among the men and they drew into a tense circle around the two scrappy pilots. But before either Dick or Murford could carry the thing further, a command snapped them erect.

"Ten-shun!"

Major George Cressy shoved his stocky bulk through the circle of men. His eyes fell on the two pilots in the center of that ring, slid grayly, coldly from Dick to Murford—back to Dick again.

In the heavy silence, the grizzled and gray old Army pilot sized the two men up. His eyes seemed to add things and come to a conclusion.

"Save your fighting for the Huns, Murford," he snapped sourly. "I can use a bit more of it than I'm getting." He

swung. "You, Malone, pull your neck in and keep a civil tongue in your head. A bad start at a Front Line squadron has ruined more pilots than Spandaus."

He nodded and was gone. But the enmity between the two men stayed on.

NOW Dick threw a long burst at the nearest of the two attackers. It was out of the question to get the Boche balloon, now. The only thing to do was to make a running fight and try again some other day.

The near Fokker swerved and skidded flat to rip an answering charge at the topmost Yank. The second slid by on greased wings, his nose on the Spad that was fleeing close to the treetops. Dick mentally calculated the time that Murford could stand up under the slashing attack from the faster Fokkers.

"This baby is the funniest ace I ever heard of," he growled as he whipped away from his attacker and down to give Murford a hand. "He manages to mess up a balloon attack, and then I have to help him get clear!"

He whanged home a steady rain of lead into the Fokker's tail surfaces, driving the Boche off. Murford zoomed up and high-tailed for home. Before Dick could wing up again, both Hun ships had hopped him and were pouring a withering fire into his crate. Dick skidded and slipped to right and left, swooped low over the trees and yanked into a hard zoom.

"This'll give Murford a chance to clear 'em off me, now," he knew. His eyes calculated the distance they had covered from the balloon site. "About two miles we've made—and twelve to go!"

But the Huns clung grimly as he danced his plane in a twisting, twirling set of maneuvers—and no other gunfire sounded to interrupt the onslaught. Dick frowned, then went into a speedy Immellmann. At the top he craned his neck and stared around. His eyes focused on a spot far

in the distance, a spot receding—

"Good God! He's running for it! Leaving me here to stand off both Huns!"

A raging fury swept over his cool brain, engulfing all common sense. Dick hauled back on his stick and swung into a steep wingover. At the top of it he sized up the position of his pursuers. He saw one close to him and slightly under. He cut his throttle and yanked hard on stick and aileron.

The Spad came around in a near spin, lead streaming from between the blades of its racing propeller. The Hun ship faltered, made a desperate attempt to break clear, but Dick was on him. He ripped another burst of lead into the frantically twisting ship, saw the bullets eat a path up the turtleback and into the pit. The pilot smashed back against his seat, pulling the crate into a spin in his death throes.

Dick whipped his bus around and charged the other Hun headlong. The second Boche made a brave stand of it—for two minutes. Then he gave it up and tailed for home. Dick chased him just long enough to be sure that he wouldn't double back. Then he swung the nose of his ship and dived close to the ground.

Across the eighteen miles that separated him from the Front and safety, Dick tree-topped it, firing bursts at the surprised ground troops under him before they could set themselves for a blast at the Spad. He crossed the Lines under a hail of lead from the trenches and the machine gun posts.

His Spad was a sieve when he guided it along past familiar landmarks and came low into Forty-One's field. He slammed his ship down to a landing and taxied rapidly to the hangar line. Without pausing to shut off the motor, he vaulted over the side of the pit and landed with cat-like agility on the ground.

"Where's Murford?" he snapped to the sergeant, who stared round-eyed, first at

the scarred plane, then at the raging pilot.

"Why, he's just come in, sir. He's going towards Headquarters, I imagine. No! There he is now!"

Murford was standing talking with someone. Dick didn't see who; he had eyes only for the blond ace. He barked, "*Murford!*"

Slowly, the flight commander turned, his eyes cold. Dick came slowly towards him, walking stiff legged.

"You yellow rat! What's the idea of running out on *me* after I pull our chestnuts out of the fire for *you*?"

"Malone!"

Dick heard the harsh bellow from far away, but he brushed it from his mind. His entire attention was riveted on Murford . . . on the man's eyes, on what the man was saying . . .

"I ran out?" Murford laughed; but his face was drawn. "How about your running out and leaving me to take that balloon singlehanded?"

Dick gasped. He stopped, blinked, took a long breath. "That does it," he said through set teeth. "I guess I have your number, Murford. And when I get through—" he cocked his hands, balling them into fists—"you'll be lucky if you can walk, let alone run again!"

Murford licked his lips. But he stepped away from the man at whose side he stood, his hands going up defensively. "Listen, you! Don't try any funny stuff, I warn—"

Dick launched himself forward and smashed a vicious right through Murford's guard. The blow caught the blond ace flush on the mouth, and he stumbled. Dick lashed him with a hook that brought him off balance, then whipped up a short uppercut. Murford's knees buckled and pitched him on his face in the dirt.

"*Malone!*"

Again that voice—but this time it was a stentorian roar. It came from the man who had stood next to Murford. Dick

unclenched his hands, let his smoky eyes drift over.

Major Cressy!

Dick's gaze met Cressy's levelly. The light of battle was still in the young pilot's face and his stare was anything but respectful. "Well?"

Twice, Cressy opened his wide, hard mouth to speak; twice he snapped it shut again. He waited until Dick's eyes had lost that burning, hard glare.

"Report to your quarters under arrest," Cressy snapped. "I'll deal with your case this afternoon!"

Dick laughed shortly. "Sure, you'll deal with me. And let the Boy Hero of Forty-One off! Even give him a medal, maybe, for botching up the balloon attack and then running out on me!"

"Silence!" Cressy roared. "Report to your quarters, sir!"

Dick snarled an unintelligible protest, made a menacing move at Murford, who was climbing up from the ground. He laughed when Murford dropped back again, his arms raised to shield him.

"Get up, yellowbelly!" he grinned harshly. The rage mounted in him again, sweeping aside all reason. "Nursie is here to see that the mean, bad boys don't slap you or pull your curls!"

He swung on his heel, ignoring the gasps that came from the shocked hearers. He didn't even turn when Cressy barked his name again and again. He walked slowly up the steps to the barracks door, kicked the portal open and slammed it shut with a resounding crash. A pane of glass fell loose and tinkled into a hundred pieces on the floor.

DICK MALONE guided the paint-new Spad with a carelessly efficient hand, but his eyes were brittle and his mouth savage. For five weeks now, the unbending young pilot had been guiding ships like the one he was flying now—several times a week—from supply stations to the

tarmac of Forty-One up at the lines.

For five weeks now, Major Cressy had waited with stony face and uncompromising eyebrows for an apology from Dick Malone; and for five weeks now Dick had stoutly held out for an admission of cowardice on Murford's part.

"I'm an old Army man, Malone," Cressy had pointed out in clipped words. "I won't have anyone in my outfit who is insubordinate. You'll apologize—or you'll do the only work I can trust to a man who isn't big enough to admit it when he's wrong. I'll put you on ferry duty to bring planes up as we need them."

Dick blinked. "But you can't do that! I'll ask for transfer to another outfit. I can work that."

Cressy's eyes bored into him. "Can you? I don't want to ruin your career for you, Malone. But one peep from you in complaint, to anyone but me, and I'll bust you out of this man's Army so fast that you'll wonder if you were really ever in it at all!"

Dick shrugged. He had heard of these star court tactics before—when a commanding officer would ask, on the quiet, to have his wishes respected by the other members of the tribunal who were to hear the facts. 'For the good of the service,' such requests were usually labeled.

The young pilot considered only briefly. "An apology to you means that I admit I was wrong in knocking the hell out of Murford, doesn't it?"

Cressy said, "I'm not discussing this thing with you, Malone. I'm giving you orders—and a choice. Which will it be?"

"Ferry duty," Dick told him crisply. "I'll spend my life on it before I'll knuckle under to any high-handed stuff like this."

Cressy's eyes studied the youngster in wonder. He shook his head slowly, threw his pencil down on the desk. "Get out of here before I change my mind and bust you out of service here and now!"

Dick got—without a salute to his com-

mander. And he wasn't even called back.

But during the five weeks that followed, he found himself wishing vaguely that he had been able to 'knuckle under'; that he had been able to swallow his pride and give the apology that would have made him once again a full-fledged member of Forty-One Squadron.

All his life, Dick had taken pride in any organization of which he was a member. The record that had been Forty-One's when Dick came to join that outfit had been among the best on the Front. But things were changing now.

Conklin and Gaithers, two of Forty-One's leading pilots, had been shot down in a furious action over the Front. Murford, alone, of that high scoring flight of five, had returned. Hariss, a rookie, had made a getaway but crashed badly in landing. Thompson, the fifth man, had never been heard of again.

The effect of this devastating blow had told most heavily on the newcomers with the squadron. At a crucial time in their flying careers, they were thrown into the center of a tragedy that set the entire Front talking. They were jittery as cats caught in a dog house.

Now Cressy threw his whole reliance on Murford; a reliance which Dick wondered at. More than once he was tempted to have a show-down talk with Cressy, to try and convince him that Murford was the reason behind the failures to down balloon objectives; the reason that photographic details were not being conveyed; the prime factor in the increasing casualties among the rookie pilots.

But Murford was the oldest head left at the squadron, and consequently was the one assigned to take the fledglings out on their conditioner flights. Some of them never returned. Dick thought he knew the reason why.

But he couldn't bring himself to the point of excusing or justifying Murford's conduct, the day of that balloon raid five

weeks back. The lines in Cressy's face deepened, the nerves of the outfit drew tauter, came closer each day to the breaking point. But Dick flew on as ferry pilot for the squadron, and Cressy maintained the stoical silence he had shown towards the lad since that stormy day long weeks ago.

And then came the stunning blow when Murford flew back from patrol with four of his ships missing—three of them rookies, one a seasoned veteran. The two survivors, other than Murford, were close mouthed but hard-eyed. They made succinct reports, *after* Murford had recited his. But they avoided their leader as though he had the plague.

Dick noticed. He saw his chance and drew one of the men aside, a good looking, big kid named Mullins.

"What happened?"

Mullins stared back at Dick a long moment. He shrugged. "You don't want a buddy cutting into your ferry work, do you?"

Dick held the man's eyes while he lit a cigarette. He took a long drag. "What makes you think that?"

Mullins laughed sourly. "When I was on leave in Paris, I met a lad who had been to ground school with Murford. He said Murford was always boasting about an uncle with a big pull—one of the old-time pilots of the U. S. Army. Started in 1910."

Dick heard; but it didn't make sense. He shook his head. "You'll have to come out of the bushes. I can't figure it out." Mullins looked around him cautiously. He got to his feet and started away. Near the door he turned.

"The uncle's name is Cressy," he said slowly. "But forget I told you, will you?"

A flush of rage mounted Dick's cheeks. He threw his butt on the floor and ground it viciously under his heel.

"So that's the game! And here I was thinking that Cressy was maybe only a

hard-boiled old soldier who was taking me over the hurdles for being too lippy!" He laughed suddenly. "No wonder he got mad when I referred to him as 'nursie.' The louse!"

That afternoon, later, Cressy sent for Dick. "You can go back on active duty, Malone," he said, his eyes averted. Dick found himself hoping it hurt the man to say it. Then he pulled his ace.

"No, I'm not. You *won't* transfer me. Not with what I know now. I'll stay on ferry duty."

"I'm commanding you!"

"I'm refusing—until you stop wet-nursing that half-baked nephew of yours, Murford. When he goes out I go back in. But not before."

Cressy's eyes had widened. He blinked, shook his head. "Who told you that?"

"I get around—now that I'm on ferry duty."

Cressy stared hard at his desk. "You'd let that interfere with serving your squadron?"

"You do—why shouldn't I? I'm only a Looey here. You're the C. O."

Cressy sighed. "That settles it, Malone. I thought you had learned your lesson. I was going to make you flight leader. You can fly, you can shoot, you can—" he paused, stirred in his chair. "You can fight. But you can't be big enough to let the Service come first."

Dick was stunned. His face showed it. He opened his mouth to speak, but a creak was the best he could get out.

Then Cressy threw the bombshell that silenced Dick for sure.

"I guess I'll have to take over the job myself," Major Cressy said, his gray eyes blazing. "That'll be all, Malone. Shut the door after you."

DICK doubted what he had heard, until he let his thoughts play with the situation, let his mind analyze the men who were factors in it.

"He means what he says," Dick decided. "He must know that his nephew, Murford, is yellow—is laying down on his men. He won't let out on him; and he can't let the slaughter go on."

He was on the Line next morning to see the veteran hop off. And he read the astonishment in the faces of pilots and mechanics alike when the stumpy, crusty old veteran marched out in a Sidcott suit that was a yard too large, and gather his flight around him.

"I'm an old hand at this game—at flying," the veteran Cressy told his men. "I may not be able to whip a Spad around the way you lads can. Not at the start, anyway. You see—" he paused, his eyes serious on the circle of faces—"you see, I've never flown a Spad. So you boys give me plenty of room on the take-off. If I make it all right, I'll meet you at ten thousand feet. If I don't make it?—keep on going; regular patrol; Murford in charge. Let's go, men."

Dick stared, open mouthed. He felt his eyes go wet at the sight of the square-built little man who climbed into the speedy, tricky pursuit ship with the confidence of a seasoned ace. Cressy, who hadn't feathered a control stick since that far day when a Jenny was a new-fangled sky contraption that mounted its prop in front and had a real, enclosed chair instead of an open-air office out on the wing.

Cressy gunned the little fighting plane into a crude take-off. He all but left his running gear on the ground as he took off, one wing low, and skidded sideways across the ground. He negotiated a stalling turn at the end of the field and brought Dick's heart into his mouth when he lost altitude coming downwind.

It took him ten minutes to climb to five thousand feet. The rest of the pilots were grumbling when they eased up into their pits for the take-off. Dick heard Murford say:

"Imagine having to fly in the same sky

with *that!* The Huns are much safer than we. Oh, well—one beauty of it is that it can't last long."

Dick felt his face go hot. He walked over and spoke to Murford in a low voice. "The only thing that saves you getting your face beaten in right on the spot is that little old man up there." Dick jerked his head towards the Spad that climbed laboriously for the heights.

Murford stared. He watched the other pilots pull away. It was Murford's habit to watch his men safely in the air before he hopped off himself. His attitude was clearly one of "This is still my flight."

After a moment he turned to Dick, his eyes curious. "What do you mean? What's the 'little old man up there' got to do with me?"

Dick grinned slowly; but it wasn't a friendly grin. "He's your uncle. That's no secret, you know."

Murford's mouth came open in astonishment. "*What?* That horny-handed little so-and-so my *uncle?*" His face cracked into a wide smile and he slapped his knee. "I get it," he guffawed loudly. "Oh, my God, that's rich! Major Cressy—my uncle!"

Dick blinked. "Isn't he?"

"Hell, no, man! My uncle is Colonel Lambert *Christie*—Chief of the Air for the A. E. F. *This* guy, Cressy, is no more officer material than any other grease monkey who's been raised in rank because of wartime emergency. He was an old flying sergeant." Murford shook his head. "The old boy—the colonel—thinks the sun rises and sets on this yegg."

A slow grin spread across Dick's face, a grin of purest delight. "Is that the truth, Murford? You're not kidding me?"

"So help me! Do you think I'd—" The flight leader broke off, his face pale. "Hey, listen, now! No rough stuff! I'll have you broken if you—"

Clop. Dick's right whistled through the air with a joyous zoom and caught Mur-

ford on the button. The blond pilot went down for a count longer than the squadron's record of victories.

"Get this lug out of the way," Dick growled to one of the mecs. "I got an idea his ship may be needed up there. And he's in no condition to fly it."

He gunned the Spad forward and off after the fast-flying flight in a screaming take-off that left the mechanics breathless.

MURFORD'S ship was riding well towards the rear of the flight and high overhead, in a guard position. Dick kept his head low in the pit, ducked out of sight entirely whenever he would see that round, helmeted head in the ship at the front of the "V" come around.

At the terminal end of the patrol, Dick heaved a sigh of relief.

"Whew!" he whistled. "Half over, now, and nothing in sight. If we can only make it back to the drome, I'll get this flight job from Cressy if I have to go clear to Paris and face old boy, Christie, with the facts. He must be pretty regular, if he likes the old Top Kick up front there."

But after another ten minutes, Dick began to see tiny points of something in his goggle lenses. He dusted them off . . . peered ahead. His eyes narrowed to slits and he cursed heartily.

"I knew it! Too good to be true!"

He fired a burst through his guns and pointed his hand ahead . . . to that little cluster of specks in the far distance—between Cressy's flight and the home diggings of Forty-One Squadron. Cressy waved his hand in some peculiar signal. The men of Forty-One flew on, their eyes on that front plane. Again came that signal—a hand waved over the leader's head, like an inverted pendulum.

Dick grunted. "What a man! He knows we should do something, but he can't figure what. So he tries to bluff it through." The ferry pilot nosed down and swept at full throttle over the flight, ranged up

alongside the leading ship and skidded gently towards it.

Cressy turned his head slightly and motioned the slowly nearing ship away, but Dick came on even closer. The commander's head turned, and Dick saw the impatient expression as the man recognized Murford's plane—then the slack-jawed astonishment when he saw who it was that piloted the ship.

Cressy swung his body in the pit, shook his fist menacingly at Dick and skidded violently. Dick zoomed up in time to narrowly avert a collision. His eyes narrowed.

"I can't let him do it. *I can't!* His ship, in the center, will be the first one they'll jump. They'll get him on the first burst."

Grimly, he pushed back, ranged alongside the leader. He snapped a look ahead; the approaching ships were only several miles away—Fokkers and Albatrosses, Dick could make them out. About fifteen of them. He raised his hand high, snapped the signal for the formation to break and line up in battle order. The ships jumped to do his bidding.

But Cressy was still in the fight. He skidded again, shaking his hand to Dick in a "Go down" signal. Dick locked his jaws and skidded his ship into Cressy's. The wings locked for a moment, with a shudder that whipped the ailerons crazily. For a tense moment they locked there as one, like two geese fighting it out for leadership of the flock in mid-air.

Dick steeled himself to what he had to do. He whipped his stick over hard. Cressy's ship faltered, then fell away in a sideslip. The commander's Spad was starting into a spin when the first of the attackers ripped down with guns blazing at the lead ship.

Dick swerved, skidded in a flat turn and ripped a continuous burst at the targets that loomed large before his eyes. He saw one ship whip past, its pilot sporting a vari-colored pennon of ribbons on his hel-

met streamers flying from the struts.

"The *staffel* leader!" Dick breathed. He keeled his crate in a fast bank and went after the Boche top man. But the Hun was wary. He went into a fast, beautifully executed Immellmann and came around with both guns blazing. Dick ducked under his prop and tried to come up behind.

The Hun duplicated his maneuver. Dick was on the end of a raft with a storm of lead raining down on him. As he dived, the Boche dived with him, both guns hammering. Dick saw with wide eyes the lines of holes that stitched themselves along his wing. He had to pull up . . . and take an inferno of lead in his face; or he had to dive more steeply, and take it in his back. He couldn't get the Boche now, he knew.

And then it flashed by—that speedy, wing-low Spad that tore from nowhere and fastened onto the Fokker's tail like a cat onto a rat. A ripple of flame flowed from the front end of that Spad, and the Boche leader straightened slightly. His head came around to the attacker. Dick stared, fascinated, at the dramatic picture.

Every line of the Hun's profile was clear cut, as if in a lifesized photograph. A trickle of sweat crept from the man's helmet and down his cheek and under his chin. In that other ship, his face square as a box and his eyes peering intently at his line of fire, Major Cressy bore straight ahead on the Boche.

The Hun seemed to go tired suddenly. His head drooped, then he turned his face to the sky slowly. His sightless eyes were still staring high above him as he plummeted for the ground far below.

Dick zoomed up and came close to Cressy, about to raise his hand in salutation. But the old timer beat him to it. Five fingers wriggled derisively at Dick from the stubby end of the major's short

nose. His broad face split in a smile.

Dick grinned, but Cressy whipped around in a ludicrous turn and raced back near him. Again an imperious gesture came from the leader of Forty-One. But this time the signal wasn't "Down!", as it had been before.

Now, with the air cleared of the Hun ships—three had fallen, and the remainder were in full flight for home—Cressy signalled again. This time he was distinctly waving to Dick:

"Take command!"

Dick Malone did.

The two walked slowly toward the headquarters shack. Cressy was explaining, "Of course, I knew how you'd got it mixed up, Malone. But I certainly wasn't going to back down then. No, sir! Not if it cost me my life."

Dick grinned. "Can't admit when you're wrong, eh?"

"No more than you can! But I don't mean 'wrong.' Not for *me*! I'd be the first to admit that. But I won't back up for hell or high water if the *other* guy is wrong." He fell silent a minute. "Malone, I'm going to request a transfer to a permanent Pool job, or ferry job—for Murford. I can't keep him, and I'm damned if I want to break Colonel Christie's heart. But—well, I had to be sure, first."

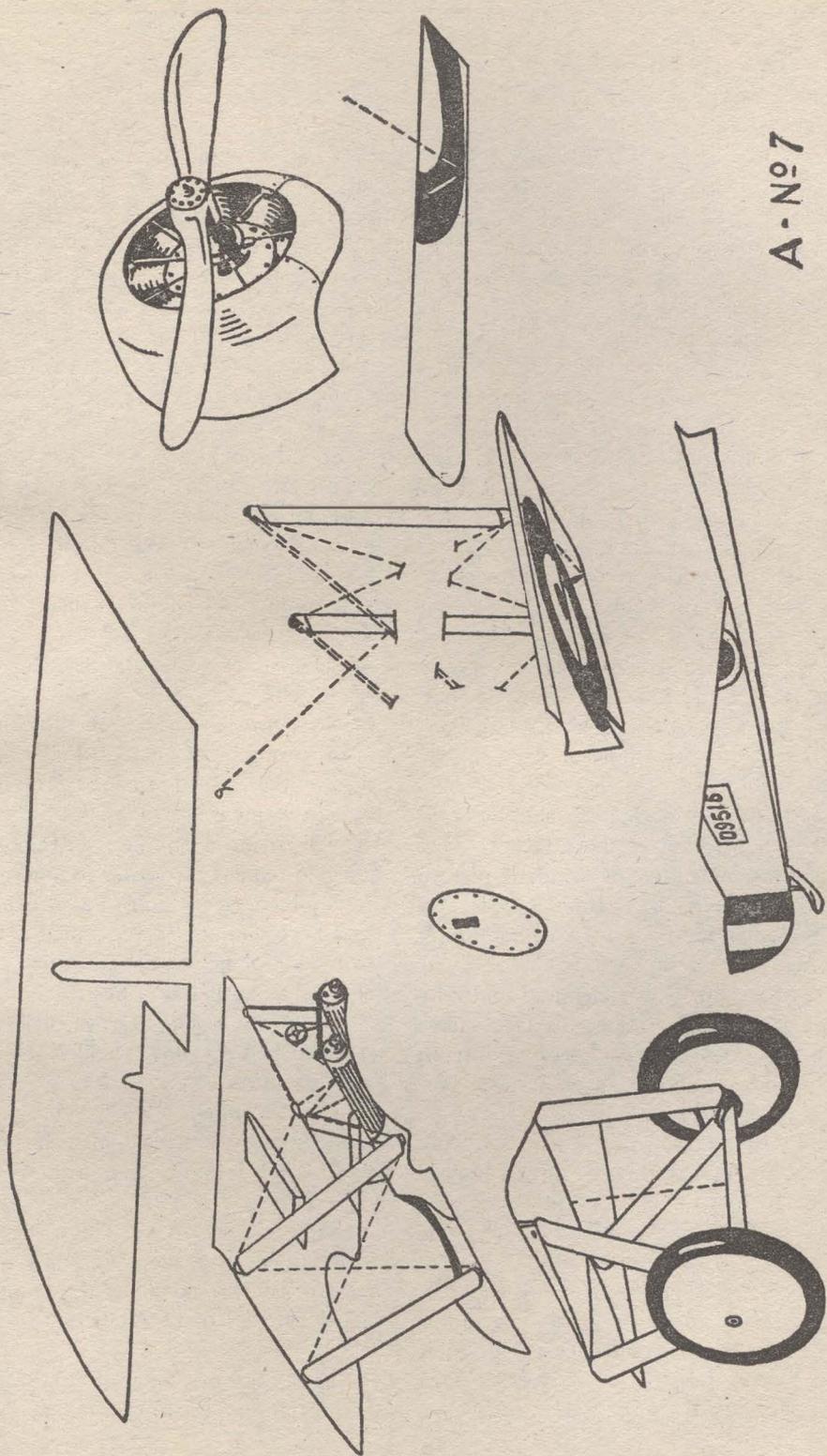
"When were you first suspicious that Murford had a yellow streak?" Dick was frankly curious.

Cressy grinned. "When you pumped those fists of yours into him. He's a good flyer. That I know. But after that—?" He shrugged.

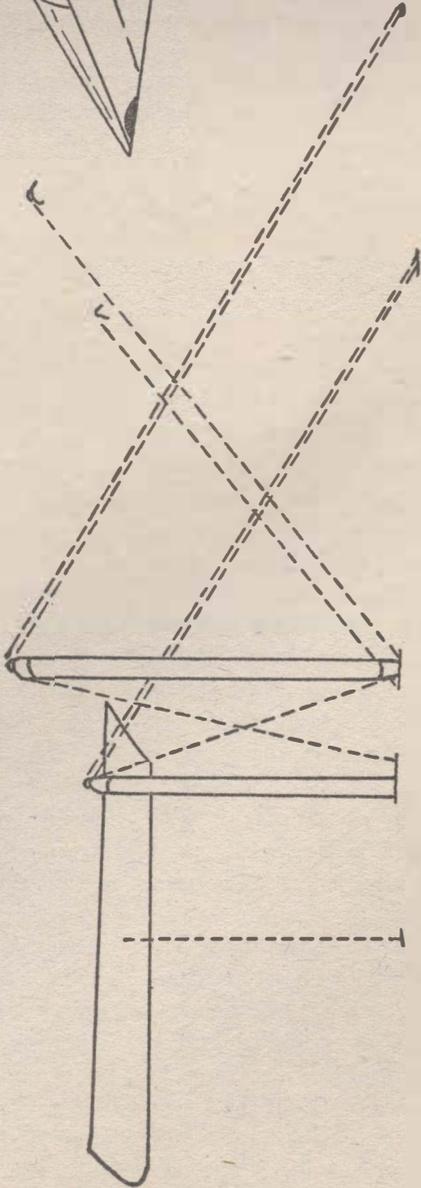
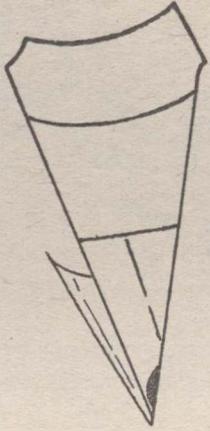
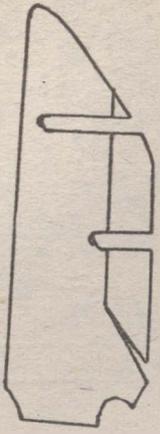
"Kipling wasn't a high-hat poet, Malone. He once said, 'East is East, and West is West, And never the twain shall meet.' I'd sort of like it better if he had said:

"'A fightin' man loves a fightin' man—
And always the twain shall meet!'"

"ASEMBLIT" №7



A - №7



B-№7



Conducted by Nosedive Ginsburg

IF THE Sky Geese will take their webbed feet and their paper wings out of my hair, your fearless Commander, Ginsburg the Mighty Eagle, will offer a few words of explanation, and assist you in drying the tears that are already turning this hangar into a lousy swamp.

I realize it's tough for you punks, not having Ginsburg to puncture your kites this month, and shower dollars down on your leather heads. But even Ginsburg must have space in which to spread his mighty wings, and that is why, when you read these sad words, your beloved Commander shall be far away. Far from the heartless jibes of Piedra and his Ailing Aeronca Aces; far from Dirty Dusty Dowst and his Aromatic Arrow Staffel Stooges; far from all you soaring squirts and free once more to breathe the empty spaces in which I have so many times distinguished myself. My noble supporters, men such as Flight Leader Adrian Smith of the Ginsburg Legion and other playmates of the padded cell, must carry on the war in my absence. Thus, this month, you shall receive no gravy for your inane and worthless contributions. This month there shall be no cash awards for poetry that would stain the tin of the foulest ashcan. But next month? Yes, dammit, Ginsburg shall be back again!

Where have I gone and why? Therein,

my punchy pals, lies a story. It is long, and is, strangely, both sad and joyous. Many air-miles lie between Ginsburg and the hangar, and I am well aware that this fact is of great importance to you nosey bunch of lice.

In the first place, the Hangar became unbearable. The presence of Louie the Lush is at all times distinctly unpleasant. The oaf eats and sleeps in a most astounding manner, but whoever is responsible for bringing Louie into the world forgot one very important item in Louie's earlier training. The Lush, my friends, is an utter stranger to water; at least, in the sense that it is applied to the outer parts of the body, usually in conjunction with soap. In short, my merry madmen, the Lush does not wash.

This would not be a catastrophe of such a major nature if he weren't so damn big, but when I say that the Lush does not bathe, it is equivalent to stating that four or five Kansas dust storms and a city garbage dump or two are sitting in the corner of the hangar.

So Ginsburg was finally compelled to retreat and leave the hangar to the tender mercies of the gentlemen who make a business of disinfecting and exterminating. It is my fervent prayer that they disinfect Louie and exterminate not him, but the multitudinous small-life that spends a happy and well-fed existence on his huge bulk.

And in leaving the hangar, Ginsburg the Glorious was motivated by still another reason. Ginsburg has gone hunting. In this respect, Ginsburg differs from any other nimrod. Ginsburg would hardly lend his time to the pursuit of the deer, the rabbit, the moose or the winging duck. (As to this last, I give sufficient time to banging sky geese out of the hangar.)

No, none of these lesser creatures will get an iota of my attention. Ginsburg stalks bigger game than this. I am off to the wilds of Labrador in search of the Weeteecharwick! You have not heard of the beast? That does not amaze me, for only one man has seen the Weeteecharwick and lived to tell the tale. I refer to my venerable grandfather, Commodore Ginsburg.

It was in the winter of '84, whilst rowing across the North Atlantic, that the Commodore first made his acquaintance with the Weeteecharwick. It mystified him at first, he told me. "Nosedive," he said, and I well remember his very words, "it near took the breath away from me." And when anything can be taken from the Commodore, even his breath, which I doubt anything but a Weeteecharwick would want, that's going some.

The Commodore's description astounded even Ginsburg the Mighty. "It has a head like a cocoanut," he told me, "fingernails like claws, and two rows of teeth in its upper jaw. It cannot walk or talk, but crawls on its belly like a reptile. A strange beast indeed."

I admitted that indeed it was a strange beast, and asked the gentle Commodore why it was called the Weeteecharwick.

"Well!" he roared at me. "What else could you call a thing like that?"

And there's something in what he says. And there's also something in the Weeteecharwick, he went on to tell me, and that's the reason for the Ginsburg Expedition. The Weeteecharwick spits pearls. (And I don't mean oysters, you muggs!)

Each expectoration of this remarkable creature results in a pure gem of ray serene. Indeed, the Commodore states that the beast he encountered was suffering from catarh, and numerous well-matched necklaces were the results of its heavings.

That, however, is but one of its many virtues. The hide, when cured, makes an excellent typewriter ribbon.

But all this hobble-gobble gets Ginsburg no pearls or typewriter ribbons, and so we must be off. The Commodore is accompanying me, of course, and if we find no Weeteecharwicks, I'm going to see if the old goat can *swim* the North Atlantic.

Of course, dear members, you must not take Ginsburg's words too seriously. Ginsburg has served you for two long years now, and in that time has grown to love you. Why, everytime I see a crack-up I wish that one of our merry members was in it; every time I pack my chute I wish it were for one of the Aeronca Aces. Ginsburg, naturally, would have his own way of packing it, and the skies would be clear of another hapless hornet.

Therefore, my sky geese—carry on! And until next month when the dollars rain again, and the abuse crowds down on my head like the Yankee Clipper landing in a bathtub, I must remain, your loving commander,

Nosedive

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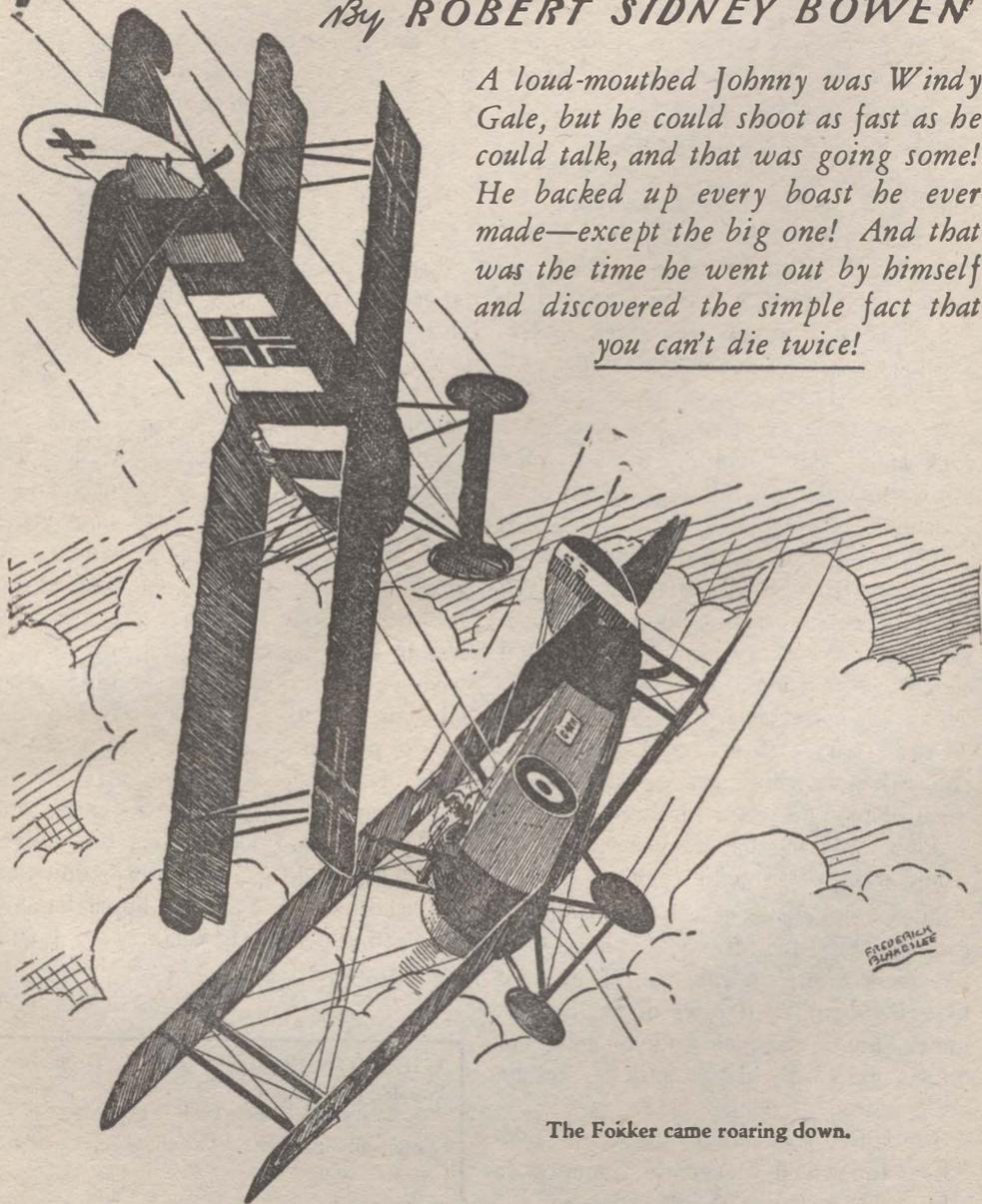
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You Can't Die Twice

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

A loud-mouthed Johnny was Windy Gale, but he could shoot as fast as he could talk, and that was going some! He backed up every boast he ever made—except the big one! And that was the time he went out by himself and discovered the simple fact that you can't die twice!



The Fokker came roaring down.

WHEN he was but six years old, the neighborhood kids tacked the nickname, "Windy" on Charles H. Gale. It stuck with him through grammar school, high school, and two years at Princeton. In fact, he even took it with him when he went to Kelly Field to start training as a combat pilot in the U. S. Army Air Service. By then, though, he

fully justified the title. Through the years education had added extensively to his vocabulary, and at the drop of the hat Windy would take the affirmative or negative of any given subject and argue like hell.

Strangely enough, he usually proved his point to the complete satisfaction of his opponent. And perhaps even more

strangely, despite his gabbing tendencies he never made any enemies and was always an accredited member of the gang. Unquestionably that was due to his good nature and happy-go-lucky bearing. You just couldn't get sore at the guy.

And no one really did, until one day in the middle of March, '18, when Windy had been a member of the 25th Yank Pursuits for two whole weeks. There was no dawn patrol that day. Instead, the pilots were corralled into the mess, where the overstuffed figure of Colonel Branker, the Wing Commander, confronted their curious gaze. The Colonel waited until they were all seated and quiet, then cleared his throat.

"Major Dawson, and gentlemen officers," he began, as though he were about to stump for a third term for Wilson. "I came down this morning to present to you a rather unusual proposition. A soldier's duty is first and always to fight for his native country when it is in danger, regardless of what he may receive for his services. Patriotism can never be purchased with gold. It is something inborn in every good soldier. However. . . ."

The Colonel cleared his throat again.

"However, there sometimes arises an occasion when it is justifiable to offer a soldier sufficient inducement to cause him to perform above and beyond his normal duties. Such an occasion has arisen in this sector which you have so gallantly defended these last few months. I refer to Baron von Steinhardt, who commands the German squadron opposite you. Since the death of Richthofen, von Steinhardt has been the air idol of the German forces. To put it bluntly, the destruction, or even capture, of von Steinhardt would be a serious blow to the morale of the enemy. I'm sure you will all agree with that truth."

The Colonel waited for heads to nod, didn't get any, and continued.

"To spur you on to greater effort, I am

offering two weeks leave in Paris in return for absolute confirmation that von Steinhardt is dead, or a prisoner on our side of the lines. In short, I want you all to concentrate upon the finish of von Steinhardt. Naturally, you must fly your regular routine patrols. However, during them, or in between times, one of you may be fortunate enough to meet him. Knowing you for the combat pilots that you are, I have no doubt as to the outcome when one of you does meet von Steinhardt. And now, are there any questions, gentlemen?"

No one spoke for a moment, then Major Dawson smiled respectfully at his immediate superior.

"You can count on us to do our best, Colonel," he said, "but I wouldn't bank on any results, if I were you."

The Colonel's brows knitted.

"And why not?" he snapped. "Von Steinhardt's not a myth, or a legend, or a ghost."

"On the contrary, he's very real, sir," the Twenty-Fifth's C. O. nodded. "However, he could well be a ghost, for his red and white striped Fokker hasn't been sighted within ten miles of the German lines in the last couple of months. The German High Command is not taking chances on any Allied pilot doing what you want us to do. For that reason, they force him to avoid all combat, and stick way behind his lines all the time. Of course we'll try, Colonel. But frankly, we'll be lucky if we see him, much less get close enough to him to press a trigger."

Colonel Branker snapped open his lips, but changed his mind. Perhaps it was because he had just enough sense to realize that he was talking to lads who knew what it was all about, and not to a lot of dumb bunnies straining to get to the Front.

"Very well, Major," he said stiffly. "Perhaps you consider it impossible. However, the reward still stands. I'm leaving, now, to make the same offer to Fifty-Four

Squadron, south of you. Good morning, gentlemen."

With a ramrod nod the Wing Commander stalked out. A minute or two later, his staff car roared into life, then the roar gradually faded out in the distance. Major Dawson lighted a cigarette and grunted.

"Take a crack at it if you want to, fellows," he said. "And if you happen to bring back the Kaiser, too, I'll personally double the reward. Get von Steinhardt? Nuts!"

The pilots started shuffling out of the mess. Windy Gale went across the room to the huge, pencil-marked sector map on the wall and studied it intently. So intently, in fact, that he didn't notice the approach of Fisher, the veteran ace-getter of Twenty-Five, and leader of 'A' Flight. Fisher reached out his hand and touched a fingertip to the map.

"That's his drome, right there, Fledgling," he said. "A good twenty-five miles behind the German lines. And there's not only his, but another squadron on that drome. Forget it, youngster. Two weeks in Paris would give you indigestion, anyway."

Windy grinned.

"I'll take a chance on that, Captain," he said. "It would be something for a fledgling like me to nail von Steinhardt in his first month, wouldn't it? You know, I think I'll do that little thing. I've got it all figured out. It's this way. I'll go from here to the French field, here, and gas up. Then it's only about fifteen miles to his drome. I'll sneak over low and buzz around until I see his red and white job. Then, *zingo!* Two weeks in Paris for me."

Fisher's eyes hardened with scorn.

"You wouldn't use your guns, of course?" he grated. "Just talk him to death, eh! Listen, Gale, you're not a half bad kid, so I want to give you a tip. I've been around quite awhile. Real front line

pilots *do* things and leave the talking about it to somebody else. Get it?"

"Sure, Captain," Windy chuckled. "But I'm different that way. I do both. Try to anyway. It's a habit. But kidding aside, I'm serious. It can be done—I mean, getting von Steinhardt. The guy flies, doesn't he? Sure. So it's just a question of sneaking over and catching him with his pants down. Of course, I may have to run for it coming back. But, hell, I had to do that when I got that first Hun of mine, the day before yesterday."

Fisher's voice was so brittle the words dropped off his lips like pebbles.

"Your first Hun—and you talk as though you had fifty! You make me ache in places, Fledgling. Get smart! We don't like blowhards in this outfit. They have to make good, first."

Windy's grin widened, and he nodded.

"Just what I figure to do, Captain," he said. "You're right, a blowhard should make good first. But tell me, I don't want to waste time on small fry. He flies a red and white striped ship, eh?"

Fisher started to turn away in disgust, but turned back again.

"Right," he nodded. "Red and white stripes; the only ship of that pattern on the Front. But if you do see it—which you won't—start saying your prayers. When I first came to the Front, von Steiner was getting Fledglings with both eyes shut. He'd get a damn wind bag like you going backwards!"

"Maybe," chuckled Windy. "But the way I see it, all I have . . ."

Fisher had walked away in disgust this time. Windy shrugged.

"Well, guy," he said to himself, "looks like you've got to show them. Let's go. They say Paris is the real McCoy."

THE next two hours Windy spent going over every nut, bolt, strut, wire, and square inch of fabric on his Bentley powered Camel. Then he had the gas and oil

tanks filled to the brim. And lastly, he personally inspected every round of ammo in the two belts. Finally, he was all set to take off on his crazy venture. As a matter of fact, he was just about to taxi out onto the field when the C.O. ran over to him.

"Hold it, Gale!" the C.O. called out. "Captain Fisher was just talking to me, and—"

"Just going up for a test hop, sir!" Windy called back after a split second of quick thinking. "She didn't act so good with full load yesterday."

If the C.O. said anything else, Windy drowned it out in the roar of his engine as he taxied out into the wind. A moment or so later he was off and nosing up toward the overcast ceiling, not more than five thousand feet from the ground. Just under the scraggly fringes of the clouds he leveled off, banked around and headed the nose for the French field some forty miles south.

Eventually landing on the French drome, Windy pulled a "I guess I got lost" story and got his tanks filled to the brim again. Then off he went, low over No-Man's-Land, heading northeast toward von Steinhardt's drome. Three times he saw German planes high above him close to the clouds, but even in the bad light he saw that the ship he was looking for was not among them, so he kept right on going.

Then, suddenly, as he skirted a hill range, he saw von Steinhardt's drome—right smack bang in front of his face. A flash glance showed half a dozen grey Fokkers lined up on the far side of the field. Some fifty yards from the end of the line, in front of a midget-sized hangar, was a red and white striped Fokker. Its prop was ticking over and there was a goggled and helmeted figure in the pit.

One flash glance, then Windy banged the stick over, jumped on left rudder and

brought his Camel around and down in a dime turn. Keeping the hills between himself and the drome, he flew straight ahead for some three or four miles, and then slowly curved upward until the bottoms of the slowly sinking clouds were almost kissing his top wings. From that position he peered ahead and down toward the German drome. A fear that had gripped him vanished. By a miracle of miracles, his sudden stumbling onto the drome had been neither seen nor heard. Not one of the Fokkers had gone racing off to give chase. All were still on the ground, including the red and white striped ship.

Presently the red and white job started running over the ground. Windy's pulse kicked up a beat and he gripped the stick harder. With the obvious effortless ease of the veteran pilot, the figure in the Fokker lifted it clear and nosed upward in a smooth climbing turn. Directly it was clear, the six grey Fokkers took off one by one and followed their leader skyward. Waiting just long enough to make sure they were going up through the cloud layer, Windy pulled his own nose upward and mused into the filmy mist.

"A break for you, fellow!" he chuckled. "Instead of using up gas waiting for him to get off, he does it for you right off the bat. Made to order, I calls it."

In fact, every little detail of Windy's plan seemed to turn out perfectly. When he finally came up through the clouds, he instantly caught sight of the German planes about three miles away. But what was even more important to the carrying out of his plans was that a few minutes later his hope of hopes came true. In short, von Steinhardt led his patrol a few miles toward the American lines, then waggled his wings in a good luck signal and circled back and away from it. It was almost too good to be true, and for several seconds Windy stared wide-eyed at the red and white Fokker flying straight into the range of his guns.

SNAPPING out of his trance, he nosed down into the clouds slightly, and like a three-quarters submerged submarine, Windy munched his Camel through the upper fringes of the cloud layer until the red and white Fokker was less than half a mile off his right wings, and perhaps five hundred feet or so above.

Continuing the maneuver, Windy waited until the Fokker was a bit past him. Then he whirled his plane into a crazy gyration that was distinctly of his own origination. Banging the throttle wide open, he went rocketing down into the clouds for some two hundred feet. Then, using every ounce of his strength, he hauled the plane up and around to the right in a wing-screaming, climbing turn. He misjudged slightly and flattened out on the German's tail some one hundred yards behind, and a hundred feet or more too low. In short, it would have been a good trick had Windy worked it.

He didn't, however, and von Steinhardt didn't have his nose buried in any book. In a flash of red and white light, the Fokker whipped up over on its back, dropped its nose, and came roaring down like ten tons of lightning gone haywire. The next thing Windy knew, invisible death was ricocheting off his engine cowling, leaving glistening gouge marks in the burnished surface of the metal.

That same invisible death would have come slapping into his face in the next second if he hadn't somehow managed to corkscrew away to the right and into the clear. The respite from the Grim Reaper was only momentary, however. Von Steinhardt had forgotten more about aerial combat that Windy would learn in the next year—if he lived. Again like flashing red and white light, the German ship seemed to pivot on its tail, nose to the sky, and then come slamming in at Windy. And again, also, the Yank fledging managed to corkscrew himself and his ship into the clear.

Windy's brain was spinning, and his heart was striving furiously to come out through whatever rib offered the least resistance. But with all that, a trickling of cold realization succeeded in impressing itself upon him. Twice in a row the German had been a sucker for the corkscrew maneuver that Windy had pulled. Of course, he couldn't hope to go on fooling the guy like that for the rest of the day. In fact, he wouldn't have the chance. At that moment he had caught the flash of wings off to his right. A two weeks fledgling though he was, his eyes were keen enough to spot the silhouettes of six Fokkers racing toward him.

No, he wouldn't have the chance to keep up the corkscrew maneuver, even though it would work. One chance was left him, and if it didn't work Captain Fisher's words would come true without question. One chance—to take the offensive away from von Steinhardt. In other words, corkscrew in as an *attack* instead of as a retreat.

Thoughts and a decision came and crystallized in a length of time that was of no more duration than the blink of an eye. Von Steinhardt's plane had swung sharply off to the left, then cartwheeled back and was thundering in for the third time. Spandaus guns clattered above the roar of Windy's engine, and made-in-Germany slugs chewed into the Camel's turtle-back not a foot from his helmeted head. A ribbon of burning pain whipped across one shoulder and stung him on the side of the neck as death missed him just by that much.

In a howl of pain, rage and just plain wild excitement, he almost snapped the rudder bar in two as he jumped on it and walloped the stick over. A dozen other Camels would have left their wings behind in such a violent maneuver, but the luck of the fledging was with Windy for that moment, and his wings stayed with him. In a flash he was cork-screwing in

at the German plane from the left. Perhaps the German pilot was expecting to see Windy's wings tear off, or maybe to see the Camel turn inside out. At any rate, the Fokker seemed to hover in mid-air for a split second. And that split second was just long enough for Windy to jab both trigger trips and fire blindly.

Just a short savage burst, and then he was forced to yank the Camel off to the side or else go prop-clawing straight into the Fokker. Momentum carried his ship up and over on wingtip, and the next thing he knew the Camel was in a vicious power spin. After two turns he managed to pull it out, right the ship, and twist around in the seat to see what had happened to the red and white striped Fokker.

What he saw was an exact replica of what he'd witnessed two days ago when he'd shot down his first Fokker at the Front. A tiny tongue of flame was licking out from under the Fokker's engine cowling. In almost no time, the ship was completely hidden in a belching mass of oily black smoke. A couple of more seconds and the German plane went plummeting down into the clouds, leaving behind its telltale trail of smoke.

It wasn't until that moment that the full significance of what he'd done came home to Windy. He'd made good after all his shouting! A screwy plan had clicked right from the start! He, a fledgling, had knocked off the most famous German ace since the days of Richthofen!

"Got him! Got him!" he bellowed in unleashed exultation. "Right on the old button! What do you think of that, Fisher?"

Twenty-Five's "A" Flight leader wasn't around to comment. However, six grey Fokker pilots were, and they said it with bursts of Spandau slugs, fast and furious. Down they came like avenging vultures straight out of hell. In ring-around-the-rosey fashion they circled

the Yank greenhorn, and started to close in for the kill. But there could just as well have been *sixty* grey Fokkers, for they couldn't stop Windy Gale.

Shouting, roaring at the top of his lungs, he whirled his ship around and charged right through the ring and went hell bent toward the American lines. So fast and utterly crazy had been his maneuver that he was outside the ring before the Germans realized what he'd done. And once outside it was just too bad, from the German point of view. Throttle wide open, nose down to gain extra speed, Windy went ripping westward, not once reaching for the throttle until the home drome of Twenty-Five came rushing up over the horizon.

CUTTING down, he landed fast, and went roaring up to the line. As he legged from the pit, Major Dawson and Fisher came running toward him. There was relief in the C.O.'s voice as he pulled up to a halt and spoke.

"So you got back all right, Gale?" he panted. "Balloons just called to say that half the German Air Force was chasing one of our ships. You were the only one aloft, so . . ."

"Didn't they tell you the rest, sir?" Windy grinned. "I got von Steinhardt. Shot him down, sir, right near his own drome! Looks like I get those two weeks, doesn't it? Like I told you, Captain, the old plan worked. And it really wasn't so tough at that."

Neither the Major nor Fisher spoke. They just stood there staring at him. Then Fisher snorted.

"That one's worn out at the Front," he said. "If all Fokkers shot down but never seen by anyone else were placed end to end, they'd reach all the way back to Forty-Second Street."

Windy blinked, and for a moment the words wouldn't come to his lips.

"Where'd he crash, Gale?" Major

Dawson asked. The fledgling blinked.

Windy's heart started down into his boots. So anxious had he been to get away from those Fokkers that he hadn't taken the trouble to notice where his victim had crashed. In fact, he hadn't even followed von Steinhardt down through the clouds. And right on top of that realization there came another chilling thought.

He'd scrapped von Steinhardt above the clouds, so of course the observation balloons, swinging on their cables at only eighteen hundred feet or so above the ground, couldn't possibly have witnessed the scrap. Still, there was a faint hope that some observer might have spotted the striped plane flaming to earth from out of the clouds. However, there wasn't much hope of that. The distance had been far too great for even a balloon observer with powerful glasses to see the details clearly.

"I got him above the clouds, sir," he finally said weakly. "I don't know exactly where he crashed. I didn't go on down through. But he was flying his red and white ship. I saw him lead the dawn patrol off."

The C.O. nodded vaguely.

"If you shot down a red and white striped Fokker," he said, "then you got von Steinhardt. I'll congratulate you, if confirmation comes through later. In the meantime, stick around the field. You were foolish to go over there in the first place, but you got off before I could stop you."

With that the C.O. turned on his heel and walked away. Windy looked at Fisher, started to grin, but cut it off. The "A" Flight leader's eyes were cold.

"Confirmation's something you don't get with talk," Fisher said. "I still like you some, Fledging, so I'm repeating my tip; do something and *then* talk about it."

With the high point in his war career suddenly kicked in the pants, some of

Windy's easy-going nature deserted him. He returned Fisher's steady look.

"You wouldn't be thinking that I made this up, would you?" he asked. "You wouldn't think I'd try to get credit by lying?"

Fisher's lip started to curl, but something in Windy's eyes changed his mind.

"The proof of everything will be in the confirmation, Gale," he said, and walked away.

Windy followed him with his eyes for a moment, then turned and looked at his ship. There was mute confirmation that he'd been in a *scrap*, at least. There wasn't a square foot of the fuselage or wing fabric that wasn't marked with the telltale hole of a Spandaus bullet. But that was all.

"I know damn well I got him!" Windy said through clenched teeth. "By God, I'll go over and bring him back, casket and all, if that's the kind of confirmation you've got to get around here!"

Jamming his hands in his pockets, Windy shuffled over to the mess to sooth his feelings with a cognac or two. As a matter of fact, he spent most of the day in the mess so that he could be near the phone in case Balloons or anyone else rang up the squadron to confirm his victory. The phone didn't ring once, however, and with each passing hour Windy's hopes slid down to a new low. Perhaps more than losing hope, he minded most the apparent estrangement of the other pilots of the squadron, all of whom had been at the Front longer than he.

For the first time in his life his ever ready tongue had really put him on the spot. To boast about doing something was one thing, but to boast about something and then not deliver proof that you had done it was another matter. Particularly when it happened to concern shooting down enemy planes. The Air Service was full of pilots who swore they'd knocked

(Continued on page 100)

How Jerry Got His Start in AVIATION

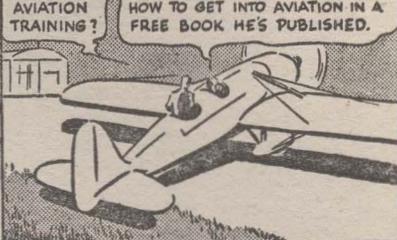
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YOU'RE IN AVIATION NOW? AND A LICENSED PILOT ALREADY! HOW COME!

LET'S TAKE A HOP. I'LL TELL YOU WHILE WE WARM UP THE MOTOR.

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GEE--THIS IS GREAT. I'LL SEND FOR WALTER HINTON'S BOOK TONIGHT AND LEARN HOW HE TRAINS MEN FOR AVIATION.

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TH'S SHIP HANDLES BETTER THAN EVER SINCE YOU'VE BEEN SERVICING IT.

THANKS BILL. HINTON CERTAINLY KNOWS HIS STUFF. I'M TAKING FLYING LESSONS NOW. I'LL SOLO NEXT WEEK.



I'M SO GLAD YOU GOT INTO AVIATION. WITH THAT NEW JOB AS PILOT FOR THE AIRLINE WE CAN GET MARRIED RIGHT AWAY.

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down Huns, when they hadn't, and to the real pilots that type was, and always would be, just so much vermin who should be left at home, or made recruiting officers.

Just before mess that night, proof did arrive. But it was not proof that Windy had shot down von Steinhardt. On the contrary it was the direct opposite. From out of the low-hanging clouds a red and white striped Fokker suddenly appeared. Engine wide open, it thundered straight down toward Twenty-Five's field, leveled off a split second before its prop would have churned into the ground, and went wing screaming up to lose itself again in the clouds. In its wake a colored message dropper fluttered earthward.

Pilots and mechanics alike had tumbled out onto the tarmac by then, and as one man they all raced downward where the message dropper struck the ground. A corporal won, and it was he who pulled the envelope from the weighted pocket. However, he instantly turned it over to Major Dawson, for the C. O.'s name was written on the envelope in a bold scrawl. When the C.O. ripped it open and pulled out the sheet inside, everyone crowded around and read the message at the same time.

To Major Dawson, 25 Squadron:

The pilot of your squadron who was foolish enough to attempt to approach my field this morning can consider himself lucky that my flyers had other more important matters to attend to than his death.

Next time he will not return, nor any others you send over on such idiotic reconnaissance work. However, if the American squadrons in your sector wish to engage in drome straffing tactics you will find us only too willing to reciprocate—to your decided loss.

I suggest you notify your supporting squadrons of this warning.

Baron von Steinhardt.

"My God, I didn't get him!"

The words burst from Windy's throat before he realized they were out. Major Dawson fixed him with a steady eye.

"It appears you didn't even come close, Gale," the C.O. said. "Close to his drome, I mean."

Words stuck in Windy's mouth. He could only stare wide-eyed at Major Dawson as the C.O. turned on his heel and started back toward the tarmac. The others followed the C.O., after giving Windy a flint-eyed look. That is, all save Fisher, who stepped to his elbow.

"You had it coming to you, Gale," he said. "Stick it in your helmet and keep it there. Gab never made any man an ace. You've been trying that ever since you arrived at the squadron. It won't work."

The red rushed up Windy's neck.

"Listen," he bit off, "I scrapped von Steinhardt this morning, and—"

"And he sent you confirmation *in writing!*" Fisher cut in. "Damn nice of a dead pilot to do that, I'd say."

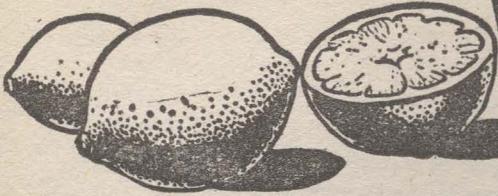
"Maybe I should deliver him in your lap in the flesh?"

"Maybe you'd better ease off that tone, Lieutenant!" Fisher snapped, his eyes crackling. "But that's an idea—that's about the only proof that I, or anyone else in this squadron, would accept from you."

Revolt shook Windy. He suddenly hated Fisher, the C.O., and everyone else in Twenty-Five. But as quickly as the rage came it faded away to cold fact surrounded by surging doubt. Had he met a striped Fokker that morning? Had he scrapped it? And had he shot it down in flames? What a blasted fool he'd been not to have gone down through the clouds and spotted the section of ground where it had struck! Too late, now. He wouldn't be able to find it in a hundred years. But what the hell, von Steinhardt was still alive, and the prop of his red and white Fokker was still churning air.

For several minutes Windy stood out in the center of the field, staring bleak-

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eyed toward the east. Then slowly he relaxed his stiffened muscles, took a deep breath.

"In their laps they want him, eh?" he murmured. "Okay, then that's the kind of confirmation they'll get!"

WINDY GALE was not among those present at Twenty-Five's mess that evening. Instead of eating, the fledgling spent the time studying maps of von Steinhardt's sector. He carefully checked every little detail of the territory with what he had seen with his own eyes that morning. When he had finished, a field located beyond the hills that skirted von Steinhardt's drome was indelibly emblazoned in his mind.

Close to midnight he went down to the hangar line, got his greaseball and started the engine of his ship. The roar of the engine brought a figure or two dashing out the messroom door. But Windy had expected that, and before any of the running figures reached him he taxied out onto the dark field in a zigzag course, then steeled himself and took off. The half-warmed engine didn't die on him, for some unknown reason, and he managed to nurse the ship up. Plowing on up through the clouds until he could see the stars, he leveled off and set a compass course for von Steinhardt's drome.

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Exactly forty minutes later, he throttled his engine and slid down into the clouds again. Flattening his glide, he strained forward in the seat for a squint-eyed view of the ground. He saw it sooner than he had expected, for the clouds had thinned. For a moment or two clammy doubt gripped his heart. In the spotted blur below he didn't see a thing that checked with what he'd seen that morning. Then suddenly a familiar landmark seemed to rise up out of the gloom. It was a bend in the Eiser River. He gulped with thankfulness. He hadn't missed by more than a mile, for the field he was shooting for was just that distance off his right wings. Fortunately he had sufficient altitude for the glide.

Switching off to kill all possible exhaust sparks, he eased the plane around to the right and cast a fleeting glance down over his left shoulder as he did so. A small cluster of lights stepped his heart beat up a bit. They came from the hangars on the east rim of von Steinhardt's field. For a split second he hesitated, started to reach for the ignition switch, then shook his head savagely.

"Stick it, guy!" he grated. "You've started, so finish it. What the hell, anyway!"

Repeating the words over and over, he virtually felt his way down through the darkness. Suddenly, the field he groped for appeared out of the gloom directly ahead of him. Sucking in his breath, he eased the nose up a bit and started wind-braking to slacken his gliding speed. Seconds later he quickly righted the ship and hauled the stick all the way back. The wheels struck like two ton of brick. The shock cord on the right wheel let go, and the wings sagged on that side. Instantly, they crabbed. The plane ground looped twice, then twisted over and dropped on its back.

Releasing the safety belt, Windy lowered himself to the ground, crawled out

You Can't Die Twice

from beneath the wreck and stood motionless—his heart in his throat—his feet ready to burn him forward at the slightest sound or challenge. After a moment, though, he swallowed his heart and cursed softly.

"Not a Hun for two miles, dope!" he muttered. "Pick up your feet and start moving."

He did that little thing through the long hours of the night, but at a snail's pace. It was hellish going through the rough, wild terrain of the sector and he cursed himself for a crazy fool a dozen times. But he still kept on going.

When finally the cluster of lights that marked von Steinhardt's drome were directly ahead of him, he slowed his pace to what was little more than a crawl. The last three hundred yards took him over two hours to travel, and once he almost died of heart failure when a blurred figure ran across in front of him not ten feet from the end of his nose. In time, though, he had crawled into the midget-sized hangar and completely buried himself under some strips of tarpaulin. By then the light of a new day was showing in the east and activity was commencing on the field.

Peering through a slit in the tarpaulin, Windy saw two flat-faced German mechanics throw the front flaps of the midget hangar aside, and dollie its red and white striped Fokker out front. Windy's eyes hardened as he saw the ship. There wasn't the trace of a bullet hole or fire scorch on it, from what he could see. As the mechanics started up the engine, and then walked away while it warmed up, a crazy impulse to dash out and leap into the pit gripped Windy. But he killed it as quickly as it came. He was there for more than just the ship. He wanted the pilot along with it.

If von Steinhardt followed the procedure he had employed yesterday morning, everything would be in Windy's favor. It

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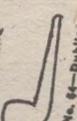
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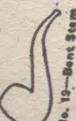
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Dare-Devil Aces

was over fifty yards from the midget hangar to the others. The instant von Steinhardt legged into the pit he'd tear out, leap up onto the wing stub and draw a bead with his automatic on the German's face. He'd force von Steinhardt into the air before the others realized what had happened. But if von Steinhardt was dumb enough not to—

A roar of engines cut off the thought. Windy stiffened, sank his teeth deep into his lower lip as six grey Fokkers flashed into his vision and went streaking across the field in follow-the-leader style. The patrol was taking off first. Without von Steinhardt? Had the Hun ace changed his mind? The thought chilled Windy's heart, almost caused him to groan aloud.

Instead, though, breath whistled softly through his teeth as a helmeted and goggled pilot ran up to the striped plane and vaulted into the pit. A grease ball ran around front, jerked one chock from in front of the wheel, and circled clear of the spinning prop to get at the other. In that moment Windy shot out of his hiding place. Like so much light he covered the forty feet or so that separated him from the Fokker. The mechanic jerking the other chock loose straightened up, saw him, and opened his mouth to yell. No sound came out. Windy's bullet caught the German right between the eyes. Even as it did, Windy leaped up onto the right wing stub of the Fokker, locked one arm about the center section strut and rammed the gun to within a half dozen inches of the dumbfounded pilot's nose.

"Take off, or this goes off!" he bel-lowed. "Take off, now!"

The German blinked. Windy gun-whipped him across the cheek.

"Now!" he roared.

That was enough for the German. His hand holding the throttle rammed it open. The Fokker trembled, shook, then virtually bounced forward. Windy didn't budge an inch as the plane bumped over

the ground, nor did he take his eyes off the German for a split second. He saw running figures out of the corner of his eye, saw the flash of a rifle barrel, and heard the muffled report as the gun was fired.

Strangely enough, the firing of the rifle, even more than Windy's gun in front of his face, stirred the German into frantic action. The man practically lifted the overloaded plane off the ground.

"Never mind altitude!" Windy shouted, and motioned with his gun. "Head west and go like hell! And don't try to shake me off, either. I'm staying with you all the way!"

THE German blinked fear-glazed eyes, banked west and kept the plane just over the tree tops. For perhaps half a mile it jerked forward, and then a sound like a giant ripping a sheet of tin in two screamed against Windy's ears above the thunder of the Fokker's Mercedes. In the next split second, one of the six grey Fokkers swooped down close. Out the corner of his eye Windy saw its pilot staring his way. Then the plane went zooming up.

Seconds later Windy's heart became a lump in his chest, and his emotions were reflected in the glazed eyes of the German pilot. The savage yammer of Spandaus fire suddenly crackled through the air. Holes appeared in the tail section of the Fokker. The pilot screamed something in German, then put it in English.

"They will shoot us down! They will kill us both!"

"Zigzag, but keep going!" Windy howled. "Maybe they will, but I'll do it first if you don't keep going."

For a split second Windy tore his eyes from the German pilot and shot a glance upward. Some two thousand feet above, and perhaps half a mile behind, five grey Fokkers were wheeling into position to dive. The sixth Fokker was at his own level and was cutting back toward him.

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Dare-Devil Aces

One snap glance and then he riveted his eyes on his pilot again.

"Rather burn you down than see you taken prisoner, huh?" he shouted. "Well, fool them, or you'll get it sooner, and I'll dump you out and fly back alone!"

The German mouthed something that Windy didn't get. In fact, he didn't try to listen. He was having all he could do to hold on as the German darted this way and that in a frantic effort to shake off the grey Fokkers that were creeping in close. By a miracle the pilot succeeded. At least, he kept the plane clear of every burst of Spandaus bullets that rattled down from the air above.

The miracle, however, could not last forever. The plane was over No-Man's-Land when two of the grey Fokkers finally managed to wheel in from opposite sides and "box" the striped Fokker. White fire cut across the fleshy part of Windy's right thigh, brought a gasp of pain to his lips. The windshield seemed to melt into air, and a ribbon of leather whipped off the top of the German's helmet. Then he lurched sidewise in the seat and stark pain became stamped on his goggled face. The Fokker heeled over crazily and started cutting off down toward the ground.

"Right it, you fool!" Windy bellowed.

He cut off the last, and half threw himself forward into the pit. His groping hand found the stick and shoved it to the opposite side to get the wings up. Then he snapped off the switch and yanked the throttle back. Then, with a backward lurch and a pull of his free hand, he stumbled back onto the wing stub again.

"Land—land any place!" he roared at the fear-stunned German. "We're over the American lines. Land, before they ridle us, damn you."

The German nodded vaguely and took hold of the stick. But as he started to apply right rudder his face contorted with

(Continued on page 108)

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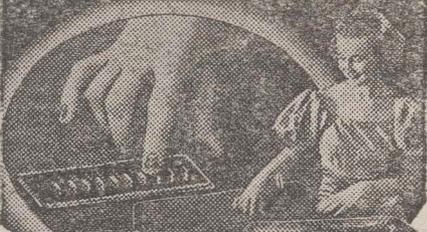
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Dare-Devil Aces

pain and the plane wobbled again.

"Gott, my leg!" he shrieked. "It—"

Windy didn't hear any more. At that moment the plane struck the ground on one wheel and lower wingtip. The hammers of hell beat against every square inch of Windy's body, and fire seemed to form a curtain all about him. Then unseen hands grabbed hold of him and flung him blindly out into space.

The next thing he realized, he was flat on his back staring up at cloud-dotted skies. A heavy, acrid smell was in his nostrils. He moved his head to the right, saw the crumpled wreckage of the striped Fokker. Smoke was beginning to curl upward from the far side. And then he saw the huddled figure striving weakly to crawl from the wreckage. With a choking groan, he rolled over and scrambled to his feet. Every move shot new spears of pain through him, but he gritted his teeth, stumbled over to the wreck, grasped the German by the shoulders and hauled him free. Exhausted, he sank down on the ground beside the groaning man.

Presently the German sat up, stared dully at his bullet punctured right leg, then raised his eyes to six grey specks to the east.

"Swine! Swine dogs!" he snarled. "They would have killed me—killed me to keep it a secret. Mein Gott—they would have killed me! Me, their comrade!"

"A nice bunch of boys, von Steinhardt," Windy said. "No wonder the German Air Service isn't so hot, when they'd shoot down their own squadron commander to stop him from being taken prisoner."

The German kept his eyes fixed rigidly on the retreating Fokkers.

"I am not Baron von Steinhardt," he said. "He was shot down in flames yesterday morning, killed."

Windy jumped a foot and didn't even

(Continued on page 110)

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feel the pain. When he landed again.

"He was *what?*?" he yelled.

"Shot down in flames, and killed," the German said, as though talking to himself. "I saw him die."

The German paused, and the muscles of his face twitched.

Windy could see that this was tough going for him. The man had just admitted a truth that he had risked his life to conceal: a truth, which, when brought out into the open, would do much to lower the morale of the German Air and kite the spirits of the Allied fliers. Windy waited for the distraught German to continue.

"He was a great airman, a great fighter," he said presently. "We of the Staffel thought it best to keep his death a secret. The truth would be bad for the German people. He was their idol, like Richthofen. But the Americans must not know that a single pilot killed him, at all costs, so we painted another ship just like his and wrote a message to the commander of that American squadron. I, myself, flew it over, and dropped it. That would prove to them von Steinhardt still lived."

The German paused again, turned pain-rimmed eyes to Windy.

"This morning I was to fly over our troops in a plane exactly like his," he said. "It was to dispel any rumors the enemy might have circulated during the night. Their propaganda officers are clever. But you saw what happened. My comrades would have killed me, to keep the secret of a dead man from the enemy. That is not war. Dead men are dead! Mein Gott, my own comrades tried to kill me!"

"And came damn close," Windy said grimly. "Nice guys, in your army. A break for you I took you away. Well, let's go. I've still got to deliver you."

"Deliver me?" muttered the German.

"In a guy's lap, in the flesh," Windy nodded. "It was supposed to be your boss, but you'll do just as well, pal."

THE END

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