

MARCH

DARE-DEVIL ACES

15¢



THE SCARLET BATS  **THE SHANGHAIED PATROL**
 by STEUART M. EMERY by C. M. MILLER
 Also ROBERT J. HOGAN, O.B. MYERS, ORLANDO RIGONI, ETC.

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WRITES
GEORGE BAILEY

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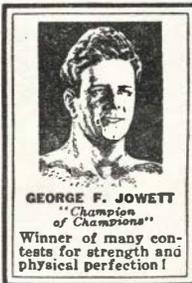
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VOL. 9

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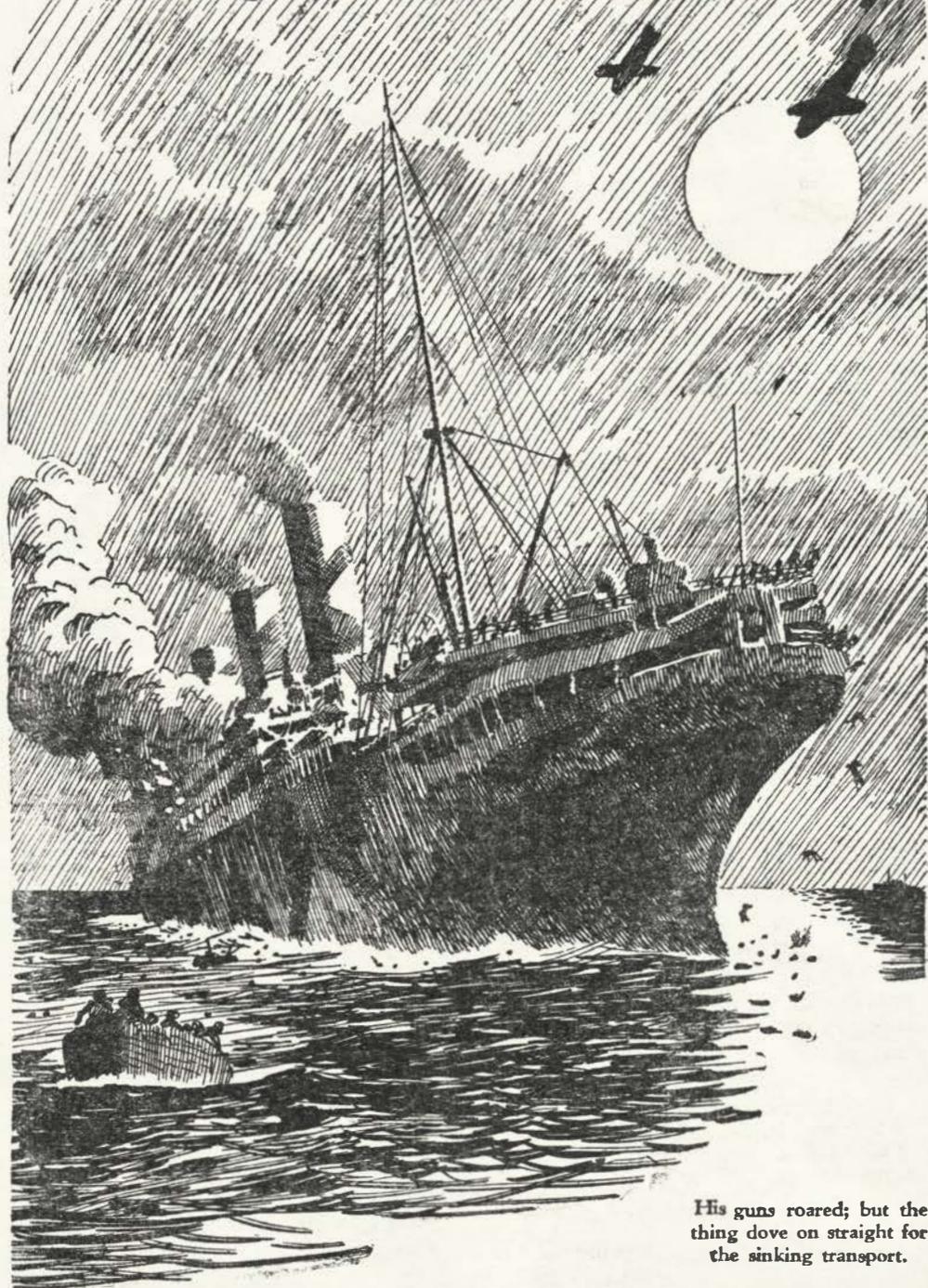
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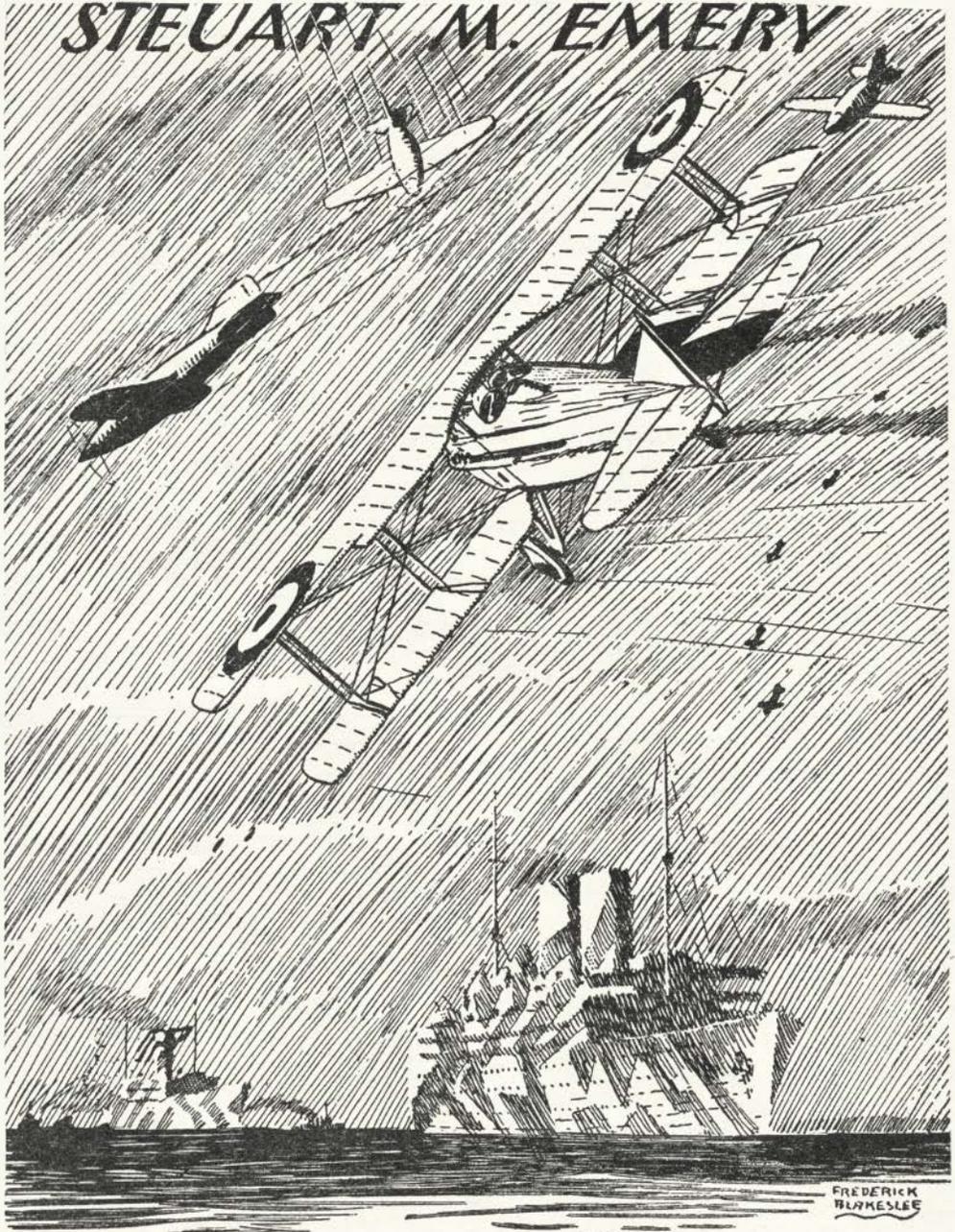
The Scarlet Bats

Smashing Sky-War Novelette by



His guns roared; but the thing dove on straight for the sinking transport.

STEUART M. EMERY



Twice he had seen them strike, wipe out thousands of men in a few minutes of hell and flame. What were they? Where did they come from? The Front trembled beneath their scarlet shadow, but two Yanks took up the challenge, followed their dynamite wings into action skies!

CHAPTER ONE

Bats from Hell

LEANING on the parapet of Waterloo Bridge, Steve Waring drew a crumpled package of cigarettes from the blouse of his tunic and slowly lit one. His eyes were shadowed with disappointment as they roved along the

darkened river that flowed through a London, sunk in the shadows of wartime. Aimlessly he sent a puff of bluish smoke out over the parapet while the cool breeze fanned his forehead.

"Swell job, this," he muttered angrily. "General office boy and Lord knows what at American headquarters in dear old London while the rest of the flying pool were sent on to France. One week cooling my heels in the anteroom and not a bit of work handed to me yet. Suppose I'll spend the rest of the war in that blasted office. What the hell!"

He flipped the butt of the half-smoked cigarette toward the water below and stood staring after it moodily.

The moon, riding high in the starlit arch, sent a flood of clear silver light onto the racing current. It showed the ripples and the tiny splashes of foam as the waters struck the bridge arches. It showed also a dim form that rolled sluggishly on its slow journey to the sea.

A pallid face appeared in the water and the clothes that the figure wore were revealed. A thrill of horror ran through Waring's fibres. The figure wore a Yank uniform!

In an instant he was racing along toward the end of the bridge, where the figure of a constable was visible. The officer looked up stolidly as Waring rushed forward and seized him by the arm.

"There's an American officer's body in the water!" he explained. "Floating out with the current. It just went under the bridge!"

"What's that, sir?" came back the bobby. "In the river?"

He broke into a run and led the way to a short flight of steps that ended on a landing stage. Midway in the river the swift shape of a motorboat was passing, headed upstream. The constable flung a

whistle to his lips and loosed it in short blasts.

"River police boat, sir," he explained. "They'll head this way at once."

In his other hand he held a flashlight, the beams of which went on and off in jerky signals. Immediately the police boat swung around and came arrowing for the landing stage. It drew up alongside and a sergeant called out.

"What's up?"

"Lieutenant here has seen a body pass under the bridge," answered the bobby. "It's a Yank officer."

A low whistle came from the sergeant. Two more officers stood close to him.

"Jump aboard, sir," he said. "We'll get right after this."

With a bound Waring was in the cockpit and the motorboat started away from the landing. Steve pointed toward the arch above which he had been leaning a few minutes before.

"I was standing there," he said. "The body went right under me, moving pretty fast."

"I know this river and its currents," the sergeant assured him. "Through that arch, what? It'll be carried close to the bank, then along this way. Keep a sharp lookout, lads."

The other two policemen moved forward into the bow, picking up a long boathook. Waring crouched at the rail, staring out across the moonlit waters.

Despite himself a shudder passed up and down his frame. That drowned body of a comrade rolling slowly down the moonlit river was a sight of horror. Who was the Yank that had met such a fate? He might never know.

The motorboat shouldered at a slow pace close in by the shore while muttered comments came from the policemen in the bow. Suddenly one of them spoke.

"Searchlight, Joe. Something off to the side and ahead of us."

The long yellow beam of the light shot out over the murky water. Waring stood up and looked over the bow. He too could see the bulk in the water.

"That's him," said the officer with the boat hook. "Bring us up alongside."

The hook went out and fastened firmly into cloth as the motorboat came to a stop. With a firm pull the policeman brought the water-soaked weight up to the gunwale and the pair of officers lifted it aboard and laid it out on the planking. Then a torch flashed on the features. Between the eyes of the dead Yank officer showed a black hole.

"This poor chap never was drowned," said the sergeant soberly. "He was shot. We've got a case of murder on our hands."

Waring gazed tensely at the dripping face that was revealed by the light.

"Where have I seen him before?" he murmured. His brain raced. Then he stood up. "I'm familiar with this officer, sergeant. I can't tell you his name because I don't know it, but I've seen him again and again in American headquarters. What his job was I don't know either."

The motorboat, moving upstream, brushed again at the edge of the landing stage from which it had started.

"It may be irregular but I suggest that we take the body straight to American headquarters for identification and investigation. After all, this officer is a Yank."

For a moment the expressions of the river police were uncertain. Then the sergeant spoke gruffly.

"Your idea is sound, sir. I'll go along with you so that the report I turn in will be as complete as possible. One of you men hurry up to the embankment and get the nearest police ambulance."

The body of the Yank officer was lifted out onto the landing stage and a tarpau-

lin wrapped about it. Within a few minutes the police ambulance pulled up at the top of the steps and the driver and orderly swung the sheeted casualty into it on a stretcher.

Waring and the river sergeant mounted to the front seat with the driver and the car moved off. Through dim-lit, deserted streets it passed and then emerged onto a broad, crowded avenue.

"Only a few minutes more and we'll be there," said Waring.

IN THAT instant sounded the ghastly, warning screech of a siren. Maroons exploded, hurled from the roofs of nearby buildings and the lances of searchlights swept up into the moonlit heights. Crashing, the anti-aircraft batteries opened up in sudden fury. Waring's glance went to the ceiling where, far above the drifting banks of clouds, hung a formidable shape.

"Zeppelin!" snarled the sergeant. "It'll kill a few more unarmed civilians. Damn those Boches! We haven't had a raid from them in more than three weeks. Go like hell, driver, for the American headquarters!"

Shouts and excited cries broke from the crowd in the street as it surged toward the entrances of aircraft shelters. In a terrific burst of orange flame a building halfway down the street went up, its weighty fragments crashing down onto the pavement and leveling half a dozen figures. Waring saw a woman in evening dress lying on the stones, almost buried under the debris.

Up through the glare of the searchlights scaled the glistening wings of planes, pointed for the gigantic menace. Within him Waring's heart bounded and then sank abruptly while his nails bit into the palms of his hands.

"I'd give a year's flying pay to be up there taking a crack at that Boche bag,"

he rasped softly. "Here I am, instead, down on the ground permanently."

The next instant he reeled in his seat, hurled against the police sergeant who sat beside him. The ambulance rocked and skidded while, thundering, half a house came crashing onto the street and stones smashed through the thin side of the car.

"Close, that," snarled the sergeant. "Get along, driver!"

The motor whirled on, tearing down a street where panic-stricken people ran in all directions. More explosions sounded off to the side. Far up in the air the tiny specks that were the ships of the London defense squadron still climbed for the mighty bag.

"They'll never get it," said the sergeant quietly. "They can't get up that high, sir. All we can do is hope one of the guns will make a hit before any more of London goes. Here we are."

The ambulance braked to a halt in front of the big building housing American headquarters. Expertly the driver and the orderly swung out the covered stretcher and carried it up the steps.

"In this way," said Waring curtly, pointing to the door of a small vacant ante-room of the first floor. "Sentry, notify them upstairs that an officer attached to this headquarters has been killed and his body brought in here. Get the headquarters medical officer."

"Yes sir," snapped the guard and dashed off.

A silence fell, pregnant with tension, before there came the sound of hurrying footsteps and a short, stocky officer with the insignia of the Medical Corps on his tunic collar entered and went instantly to the body with a brisk, professional air. He stripped away the covering tarpaulin and made a swift but thorough examination without saying a word.

"What is this?" demanded a deep, powerful voice. "What has happened here?"

Waring turned around and the men in the room drew to attention. Brigadier-general Hathaway, commanding the American headquarters, had entered unnoticed but in a second his personality took charge. His keen, alert face hardened.

"The word came to me that one of my officers has been killed," he said. In a stride he crossed the floor and stood above the victim. His features suddenly went taut. "Good God, it is Captain Trent! Shot through the head!"

"And four times in the back." The doctor rose quietly. "Then his body was thrown into the river. It's a clear case of murder."

The London police sergeant made a note of the name in his notebook. The pencil poised expectantly over the page.

"Robbery, I suppose?" he said. "Nothing in the captain's pockets, doctor?"

"Nothing," returned the M. O. "He has been stripped clean of everything he carried except this." He lifted the dead man's wrist where a wrist-watch was strapped. "If I'm not mistaken this watch is worth at least a couple of hundred dollars. The killers must have missed it."

"How long has Captain Trent been dead?" The brigadier-general's question stilled all conversation. It was bitten out, hard and clear. "That is very important, doctor."

"At least forty-eight hours," answered the M. O.

"Robbery of valuables was not the motive," rasped General Hathaway. A fierce glare came into his eyes. "Blast those Boches! They are everywhere!" His shoulders went back as he barked the command. "Doctor! Lieutenant Waring! I shall want you to come upstairs with me. Police sergeant, I shall notify Scotland Yard and the British Intelligence about this murder myself. There is nothing further you can do."

"Thank you, sir," returned the sergeant. He stumped heavily out of the door.

The brigadier paused for a moment, looking down at the pale face of the victim. Then he bent and drew the tarpaulin over it.

"One of the best men that ever worked with me," he said softly. "Someone will pay for this ghastly business."

ABRUPTLY he walked to the door and Waring and the M. O. followed. They traversed the hall of the building and went rapidly up the stairs to the second floor and along a wide passage. The night was young yet and through open doors Waring glimpsed groups of officers and men still working busily. The hum of activity pervaded American headquarters as it did at all hours of the day and night.

Brigadier-general Hathaway flung open a glass-paneled door and stepped inside. Waring found himself walking across a thick rug toward a desk. Already the brigadier had seated himself and the knuckles of his hands stood out white as they gripped the arms of his chair. Then one hand went out and pressed a buzzer. A door on the far side of the room opened instantly and an aide came through.

"Captain," barked Hathaway. "Get me copies of all the documents that were in Despatch Packet 21. It left here for Chaumont day before yesterday."

The aide saluted and vanished. The keen gaze of the brigadier focused on the M. O.

"You are positive that Captain Trent has been dead for forty-eight hours? I am repeating the question because it is vitally important."

"I am willing to stake my professional reputation on that fact, general," returned the M. O. "There can be no doubt about it."

A fierce oath came to the brigadier's lips but he repressed it. The aide darted back into the room and laid a heavy manila envelope at the general's elbow. Hathaway nodded and snatching up a pen and a memorandum pad began to write in swift strokes.

"You can go, doctor," he rapped. "Lieutenant Waring, you stay. Make yourself comfortable while I finish this."

Steve walked slowly over to the window and parted its curtains a trifle. Only an occasional shot sounded now in the shadowed city and no more bombs could be heard. The screech of fire sirens and hospital ambulances rang through the streets close at hand.

The raid was over. The Zeppelin had gotten away, as usual. The batteries were firing their last salvos at random.

Behind him the general's pen scratched on. Then with a quick movement Hathaway folded up several sheets of paper, thrust them into an envelope and sealed it.

"Lieutenant Waring!"

"Sir?" Instantly Steve came back and stood in front of the desk.

"Take this memorandum and this envelope. Your plane is fuelled and ready at Croydon Drome?"

"Yes, sir."

"Get out to it as fast as you can travel. My aide will order a headquarters car. You are to fly straight through to G.H.Q. at Chaumont and present this material without delay.

"These papers"—for a brief instant he studied Waring's young, tanned face—"are duplicates of the ones which Captain Trent had on him when he was murdered. They should have been at G.H.Q. yesterday. Now the Boches have them."

"The captain was here as Intelligence liason officer on special duty. He died on it—killed for the documents he carried and which were stripped from his

body. Chaumont must know at once what papers the Germans have taken. That is all I care to tell you. It should be enough."

"It is quite enough, general," said Waring quietly.

He thrust the papers into the breast pocket of his tunic, saluted and moved swiftly out of the room. A moment or so later he was standing on the pavement in front of the headquarters building. Low-slung and powerful, a gray staff car swung up to him and the sergeant driver jumped out and opened the door. "Croydon Drome," rapped Waring. "Step on it, sergeant."

"Right, lieutenant," answered the non-com and sprang in back of the wheel.

With a jump the car shot forward and went arrowing down the street, its siren howling. Steve leaned back with the rush of the wind on his face while his hand strayed to the bulge of the papers in his pocket. A reckless smile edged his lips.

"A decent job at last," he murmured. "Flying hell-bent for G.H.Q. Maybe for bringing this stuff over they'll take me off the courier route and assign me to a squadron."

Long streets of buildings were drifting out behind the speeding car. Then the bulk of Croydon hangars showed up and the headquarters motor rushed over the field and drew up in front of the headquarters office. A ground officer came out instantly and walked up to the car.

"Lieutenant Waring from American H.Q.?" he asked. "Good. They have telephoned. Your plane is on the deadline yonder." He waved his hand toward a group of mechanics busy about a lone ship. "You can take off in two minutes."

"Thanks," said Waring. "Sergeant, head for that bus."

He was swinging out of the car almost before it had stopped. Flying kit and helmet hung over the rim of the cockpit.

"General Hathaway's crowd work fast," he told himself. "There's even a complete map of the route pinned to the dashboard."

"Quickly he crammed himself into his kit and climbed over the rim of the nest. A mechanic sprang to the blade of the propeller at his command and whirled it. The engine warmed and burst into a throbbing song of power.

"Contact! Haul those chocks!" shouted Waring and the blocks came away.

He gave the Spad the gun and it shot off over the smooth turf, headed into the wind. Back came the stick and the wheels left the ground, the fast little crate fairly leaping into the air. Croydon drome's floodlight went off and he rode in the moonlit arch, jamming on even more power.

Time passed and from an altitude of three thousand feet he looked down on the white cliffs that edged the waters of the Channel.

Only twenty more miles and he would be over France. France! It had taken him a year to get there and until an hour ago he thought he would never see it.

FAR below and ahead of him as the Spad scudded out over the tossing waves of the Channel he sighted tiny lights. Off to the flanks rode other specks of light. His hand went into the flap of the cockpit and fastened on a pair of night glasses. He eased down the speed of the plane for an instant while he studied the scene.

Into the powerful lenses sprang six big, dim shapes of vessels with smaller craft cutting the water in protective formation. Transports. And the smaller boats were destroyers. Ten thousand troops crossing the Channel in one convoy! Were they Yanks?

Instinctively he put the stick forward

and scaled on down, pointing for the ships. The waters of the Channel rolled and heaved tumultuously and the transports rose and fell, steadily boring for the French coast. Only the dimmest of riding lights showed on their masts and the destroyers zigzagged in steady vigil all around them.

"No submarine can get through to that bunch of ships," murmured Steve. "They're as safe as can be."

In the bright moonlight that made the scene almost as clear as day he could discern the muzzles of the guns that jutted out from the decks of the crossing ships. Sailors stood beside them, scanning the waves. Everything was in order, everything going perfectly on the crossing and in another hour or so the troops would be on French soil.

"We've sent a million and a half men over without a loss," said Waring aloud. "I hope these men are more of our crowd."

At a low altitude he cut his motor and glided easily above the rearmost ship. Suddenly he lifted his head. Something was screaming through the moonlight above him, and in a second he saw it.

"Good God, what is that?" he shouted while horror chilled his fibres.

A small winged shape came hurtling down like an angry bat, straight for him. It veered and shot on past, scaling now at a terrific angle for the deck of the transport below. A tremendous roar crashed in Waring's ears and his ship went reeling over onto its back. Desperately he mauled at the controls. The tumbling waves, foam-crested and fierce, rose to meet him while his ship fell helplessly.

Then with a wrench the Spad came out on an even keel and zoomed, the spray flying from its undercarriage gear that had struck the water. In a mad, roaring bank Waring came around and drove for

the transport. Glaring flame leaped from its bow in which a huge hole showed. The waters were rushing into the gap.

"God!" he gasped. "It's been blown up!"

Howling, a second shape plunged down out of the heights. Everywhere that Steve looked the moonlight sky seemed to be raining projectiles. But they weren't like any projectiles he had ever seen. What in heavens name were they?

His machine guns roared at the menace that flashed down and struck squarely in the stern of the sinking transport. A terrific blast of fire rushed upward and half the side of the doomed ship opened.

The figures of men raced frantically about on the deck and dropped off into the waves. He himself was sweeping down now, barely above the water. A savage curse burst from him. The men in the water were Yanks.

"And I was hoping those boats carried the boys," he grated. "There's nothing I can do to help a single one of them."

Wildly he zoomed while gunfire crashed and pounded over the Channel. The guns of the destroyers and the transports were flaming into action, but it was too late.

On the deck of ship after ship, driven with diabolical accuracy, the winged shapes fell and with every landing a geyser of flame roared upward.

Slowly, one by one, the transports were sinking and the foaming waves rolled over their passengers by the hundreds. Sirens hooted in fearful warning.

Waring saw the stern of a transport not two hundred yards from him rise in the air and then the whole ship went sliding under the waves. In insane fury he sent his Spad hurtling to and fro, hand on the stick triggers. But there was nothing to see, no enemy to shoot at.

"I can't stay here and look at this," he told himself. "Not when I'm utterly pow-

erless to act. I'll head on for Chaumont with the worst disaster to report that they've had yet."

His straining gaze searched the heights as he sent the crate zooming upward. Then he blinked. Miles to the northeast something like a great dark blur soared in the moonlight. His hand flashed to the long range glasses and he lifted them swiftly.

Nothing showed in the lenses. Only a heavy bank of clouds that rolled across the ceiling and stretched for miles.

"Am I dreaming or have I gone crazy?" he panted.

He flung a last glance down on the sea and shuddered. Three lone destroyers rode the rough waves, circling and darting. Only minutes before there had been over a dozen ships down there, shouldering their way to France with thousands of soldiers on board. Waring's brows came together in a spasm of fury as he leveled out and sent the Spad hurtling on its way into the east. Already he could make out the dark blur of the coastline of France. He was past the Channel and he knew he himself had been in the deadliest of peril along with the stricken craft.

What were those things? Not a single one of them had missed its target. And where had they come from?

Strive as he would he could find no answer to the question. He leaned forward, corrected his flight by the map and the instruments on the dashboard, and drove at full gun for G.H.Q.

CHAPTER TWO

Dead Man's Flight

WITH a trench coat flung over his pajamas, Colonel Pennington of G.H.Q. Intelligence sat at his desk facing his chief assistant, Captain Branch. The pale light of dawn creeping in through the tall windows illuminated the long, bare room.

Colonel Pennington raised his hand and switched off the electric bulb that burned above the desk, littered now with a mass of papers. His soldierly face looked haggard and gray.

"There's nothing we can do now but wait for a fuller report," he said harshly. "The British naval base at Havre has phoned in all it knows so far. Damn it, Branch, this is more than serious! The Boches have something devilishly new up their sleeves.

"It looks like it, sir," acceded the captain. He rose tiredly and walked over to a window, letting the cool dawn wind blow on his heated forehead.

Far to the west in the lightening skies a speck appeared, growing larger every second and the throb of a speeding airplane drifted into the room.

"Courtier, colonel. He's coming on fast. Why don't you go back to bed for a couple of hours and let me handle anything that comes in?"

"No bed for me," bit out Pennington. His fingers twisted at his graying moustache. "We're too deeply in on this business since it broke to think of laying off. Is that crate landing at the field?"

"Yes, sir," answered Branch. "Just a moment." He stared into the distance and then turned around. "The pilot's commandeered a sidecar. He's racing this way."

Over the road leading from the drome tore the sidecar. Sitting in the passenger's seat Steve Waring relaxed, conscious that he was utterly weary.

For hours he had been sending his crate through the skies, boring on for Chaumont over the countryside of France. Now that he had arrived he felt the need of rest in every tired fibre.

For an instant he shut his eyes and almost drowsed. Then he pitched forward in his seat and found that the cycle had stopped abruptly in front of a huge, bar-

rackslike building. From a window on the second floor a captain was calling out in sharp command.

"Courier for Intelligence? This way at once."

Waring swung himself out of the car, passed between the sentries at the door and mounted the stairs. He went down a corridor to a room from which the captain beckoned and passed inside. Immediately he drew himself to attention and saluted the grave-faced colonel who sat at the desk.

"From Brigadier-general Hathaway, American headquarters, London," he said and drew out his documents. "I am Lieutenant Waring, sir."

The colonel took the manilla envelope and slit it open, his eyes passing rapidly and keenly over the sheets it contained. His fist struck the surface of the desk with a swift jar.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "Boche spies have murdered Trent! They took his papers, Captain Branch, the papers that told of the sailing of those transports tonight. And they destroyed every one of those ships in the Channel only a few hours ago."

"Yes, sir, they did," broke in Waring. "I was flying the Channel at that very moment." He clenched his fists as the recollection rose of shattered ships and drowning men. "I saw that whole ghastly thing."

"You saw it?" Colonel Pennington's voice rasped fiercely in his obvious excitement. He leaned across the desk.

"The British at Havre phoned us the news the minute the last of their destroyers got into port. What caused the destruction? The destroyer officers said it was some new kind of aerial contrivance that they couldn't figure out. Give me your description of the tragedy as fully as you can."

For minutes Waring spoke while si-

lence brooded in the room and every word that he uttered was listened to eagerly.

"That's all, sir," he concluded. "For the life of me I couldn't tell you what those projectiles were. They seemed to have small wings jutting out from their sides but they weren't planes. Yet they changed their courses again and again in order to strike the moving ships."

Colonel Pennington's face was a study in gravity.

"Almost eight thousand troops were lost in that few minutes," he said musingly.

"The Boches who murdered Trent rushed the papers into Germany in no time—probably by secret plane—and now we see the result. Death from the air and not a miss on a single transport. That can't mean bombs.

"No bombs ever were as horribly accurate as that. No"—hard lines crept into his face—"it means what I was afraid of. The Germans have perfected a frightful new engine of destruction. And it has got to be found and put out of action before it drives us out of the war. Thank God, there were only three or four hundred Yanks aboard the transports. You happened to be near the ship that was carrying them."

"Thank God," echoed Waring. He sighed with sheer relief. After all, it was something to know that he had not been a helpless witness to the slaughter of thousands of fellow-Americans.

"Those were British bottoms carrying British reinforcements," went on Pennington, tapping the papers on the desk. "It's all in here. The Boche agents in London must have been trailing Trent for days and they got him when they wanted to.

"I hadn't worried about his delay in reaching here. He had his own system of working. I had complete confidence in him although I saw him very seldom since

his assignment to us a month ago. He died just as much in the line of duty as any Yank in the trenches. Now to figure out how we can get to the bottom of this new Boche danger."

He ceased speaking and an expression of intense concentration came into his features. Then his head lifted abruptly. A light tapping sounded on the door leading into the corridor.

"Who is there?" he demanded sharply.

"Major Mulhern, the cipher officer," came the reply. The door opened and a tall, spectacled officer with lean shoulders and a scholarly air stepped in.

"I hope I am not disturbing you, Colonel Pennington, but I think that I have something here that is of vital importance."

The major's face flushed with excitement as he advanced and laid a sheet of paper in front of the Intelligence colonel. His long forefinger touched the lines typed on it.

"About ten o'clock last night we picked up a cipher wireless message from a brand-new station that the Boches have established in Germany. It has taken us all this time to break down the code which is also new. And then only a short while ago we caught a second message from the same station. Both of them were addressed to the high command at Spa. I shall read you the results."

SCARLET BATS WILL LEAVE BASE AT X-HOUR TO ATTACK TRANSPORTS IN CHANNEL.

He paused while Colonel Pennington clutched at his arm.

"Go on, major, go on!" said the Intelligence head hoarsely. "This is more important than you can guess."

"Here is the second and latest message," went on Major Mulhern.

SCARLET BATS DESTROYED SIX TRANSPORTS AND THREE DESTROYERS. THE

THIRTEEN LOST. REST SAFELY BACK AT BASE HERE.

The major's finger left the paper.

"Both of the messages were signed von Lanzmann. Cannot we call the coast and have this confirmed?"

"It has been confirmed." Colonel Pennington's voice rang hard and grim. "Both by this eye-witness here—Lieutenant Waring—and by the British destroyers at Havre. The Scarlet Bats, as they are called, have done their work as stated. Major Mulhern, I congratulate you on a marvelous job of breaking the new German code from this wireless station."

Suddenly he bent down and a flare of triumph came into his eyes as he studied the messages. When he looked up his tones thrilled with exultation.

"They trusted too much to the secrecy of their latest cipher, major. They have given away the location of the Bat's nest. Look at the last sentence. 'Rest safely back at base here.' God, do you see what that means? If we can locate the new wireless from which that message was sent we have spotted the nest of the Bats!"

"You're right, sir," returned Major Mulhern. Then his face clouded. "But it isn't so easy to trace down the spot where a wireless call comes from. We haven't located it yet and they've stopped sending. When they start again we can do our utmost with our range-finders but perhaps they won't go into action for days."

Colonel Pennington's mouth became a thin, decisive line.

"No delay can be risked here. Suppose those devilish Scarlet Bats go into action again today or tonight? There's no telling where the next blow may fall. There are plenty of weak spots in the Allied war structure. A tremendous smash on one of those and it might mean victory for Germany. Locate that wireless, major, and at once."

"I shall do my best, colonel," said Mulhern. He shrugged his lean shoulders. "But I'm afraid any quick action is utterly out of the question. I'll have a look in at the map room. They have all of Germany outlined in that department."

Colonel Pennington motioned briefly toward Waring.

"Bring back anything that the major may dig up in the next hour. After that I'll want you to take a full despatch on this business to Brigadier-general Hathaway in London."

"Sir," broke in Steve. "I was hoping that—" A sudden sinking sensation assailed him. "This courier job of mine—"

"You're doing very well on it," rapped Pennington. His face was turned aside and he was busy with the papers on the desk. "That's all for the moment, Lieutenant Waring. Get along with you."

"Yes, sir," said Waring bitterly.

He saluted and strode out of the room, following the cipher major. They walked along the passage to its end and passed into a huge, high-ceilinged room. At desks sat officers and clerical soldiers, and sheets of maps littered the place. Tall windows on one side let in a flood of sunshine.

"They've just completed a marvelous map of the whole Yankee sector," confided Major Mulhern. "It's got the positions of every German and American division in the area laid down. Wouldn't the Boches give their ears to get hold of it, though? But Major Barlow is a cautious bird and nothing will ever leave this room. Here he comes."

Mulhern beckoned to a broad shouldered officer who was weaving his way toward them between the desks and drafting boards.

"Hello, major," he greeted cordially. "I'm in here on a little private job. Get me out all the maps of Germany you have."

"That sounds like a large order," re-

turned Barlow in a friendly tone. "However, this department is used to large orders. I'll have a stack of maps two feet high on that table over yonder for you in fifteen minutes."

WARING stood quietly by, his gaze roving over the busy room. At its other end stood a captain, his profile half-turned. His hands were filled with documents. As he stepped closer to the window where the light was better, his whole face came into view.

Waring stiffened and a gasp of surprise broke from him. The features were all too familiar, branded on his brain by stark tragedy.

"Who is that officer?" he demanded.

In spite of himself his voice rose in excitement and the captain turned and stared at him.

"Captain Trent of Intelligence," said Major Barlow. "He just got in half an hour ago from London. He wants maps too—those of the American sector. This is my busy day."

Quietly the officer was moving toward the window, thrusting his maps into the breast of his tunic. One hand fell surreptitiously to the butt of the Colt that nestled in his holster.

"Stop him!" shouted Waring. His own gun leaped into his hand. "That's not Captain Trent! It's a Boche spy! Captain Trent has been murdered in London!"

Up came the other man's gun and a jet of flame erupted from it. Waring felt the bullet tear the cloth at his shoulder as he leaped forward, firing.

His shot crashed into the wall; the next instant the Boche was leaping through the window. Startled faces looked up from desks.

"After him!" rasped Waring as he raced down the room. "Don't let him get away!"

Two non-coms jumped from their desks and plunged for the window at the command. A pair of shots exploded and they staggered back, hands clutching horribly at their breasts before they fell.

Waring leaped over their bodies. But the few seconds delay had been enough for the spy. The window gave onto a narrow balcony and from its edge it was only an easy drop to the ground. Already the false Captain Trent was on the grass, rushing toward a brand-new Spad that stood some seventy-five yards away, its motor idling.

"Landed right where he could get at his crate if he needed it in a hurry," muttered Waring.

Already he had one leg across the balcony railing and was bringing his body over it.

"The blasted Boche had the nerve of the devil! And now he's going to get clear!"

Clinging to the lower part of the railing he dropped, striking on the ground with a shock that sent pain shooting through his legs. Then he was scrambling up, face set and eyes gleaming. The Boche hurled himself over the rim of his cockpit and the idling motor burst into a roar of power as Waring staggered across the turf with his gun out. Steve's lips tightened at the agony that shot through one ankle.

"Wrenched it!" he snarled. "Cripes, I'll never make the grade!"

Thundering, the Spad started and came streaking along the turf, straight for him. There was no chance for it to turn aside or ground loop at so close a distance. It had to come head on.

Waring poised himself with feet braced well apart and leveled his automatic at the head of the pilot, framed in the cockpit between the muzzles of machine guns. Dimly he was aware that shots were crashing from the balcony of the headquarters building behind him.

"One chance in a hundred!" he grated and pulled the trigger of his Colt.

It roared and then the gun went dead with an empty click while the plane plunged down on him. He had forgotten to reload the magazine.

Out from the bores of the plane's quick-firers tore twin streams of flame and the volleys of bullets whipped past him. Desperately he flung himself to the ground just as the Spad hurtled full onto him and the racing wheels of its undercarriage passed on either side.

The din of the motor that had almost deafened him grew less and less. He sat up, still gripping his useless weapon, and a snarl edging his lips.

"He got off!" he rapped. "And that'll cost the A. E. F. plenty of lives in no time! Good God, what's that?"

Down from the heights with its guns clattering tore a second Spad. It had dropped out of the arch and was scaling at a mad speed for the Boche's crate. Now it was squarely on the spy's tail, flinging in lead ruthlessly.

Around in a roaring bank drove the Boche, reeling out of the line of fire and streaking back toward the headquarters building. Savagely the Yank pounced on his tail and a long stream of tracer ran up the camelback of the German.

At a frightful velocity both ships, still rushing downward, drove for the roof of the headquarters building.

"Zoom!" shouted Waring. His heart leaped into his mouth. "Zoom, Yank, or you'll crash!"

IN THAT instant he saw the Yank's volley smash into the back of the Boche pilot. The Yank's crate lifted steeply and shot on over the building. But the German ship did not come up. Its nose dropped and at full tilt it struck the roof and fell in splintering wreckage, rolling off the sloping tiles.

Waring raced for the debris as fast as he could travel. The pain in his ankle had vanished. It had only been a temporary wrench, after all.

Men were emerging from the doors of the building and coming around the corners in an excited crowd. Waring reached the wreckage and stared down at the pallid face of the pilot. He was out, done for, drilled clean by the bullets of his pursuer.

Even now the Yank's Spad was circling back easily and dropping to a landing down the grassy stretch. Waring mustered all his strength and, reaching in, lifted out the body of the German, stretching it on the grass.

As he did so a sudden blast of smoke poured from the wrecked engine and a spit of fire followed. The next instant the wreckage was blazing while he drew the body well away from it.

"You got him?" said a deep, familiar voice. "I have just been notified that a spy was escaping. Good God, is it Captain Trent?"

Colonel Pennington was standing above Waring. Major Mulhern, the cipher officers, and others crowded close by. On their faces relief was mingled with amazement.

"No, it isn't Captain Trent," said Waring quietly. He passed his handkerchief over the face and eyebrows of the Boche. The moustache and traces of make-up came away.

"But it's a devilish good actor who impersonated him and knew exactly what he looked like. If I'm not wrong it's probably one of the Boches who murdered the captain in London."

He thrust his hand into the German's tunic and drew out a handful of papers.

"He got what he was after but he didn't escape with it. That Yank who dropped out of the sky fixed him. Here's the man you want to thank, colonel."

He pointed toward the figure of a flyer who was striding over the turf from the parked Spad. A sudden ejaculation broke from Waring and a smile came into his face. He strode hurriedly forward, holding out his hand. The incredible had happened, but then the incredible happened every day in France until it became ordinary.

"Spike' Barton!" he burst out gleefully. "Spike, old scout! I lost track of you months ago when they shipped you out of Kelly Field ahead of me."

An answering grin dawned on Spike's homely features. Their hands met and gripped.

"You old son of a gun!" Barton chortled. "I saw the shooting from a thousand feet up and brought out my glasses. I spotted your ugly mug right off and sailed in to wipe out the guy who was firing at you. Boche spy, was he, or a deserter or something?"

"Boche spy," answered Steve. "And you knocked him off just in time. Colonel Pennington"—he turned toward the Intelligence head—"this is Lieutenant Barton, my best friend. He's here from—"

"Paris," put in Spike, saluting. "Flying courier to Chaumont."

"You've done a damn big thing, lieutenant," bit out the colonel. "The A. E. F. needs men who can use their heads in a hurry. You've stopped a German spy who was getting away with some hot stuff. We've gotten our maps back and besides—" he ruffled the documents in his hand—"some other material I want to look into. You men come with me."

Abruptly he turned and stalked into the building by the nearest door. Spike Barton nudged Steve with his elbow and spoke cheerfully in a low voice as they followed the colonel.

"Where are you in this *guerre*, old buzzard? Got a squadron or are you stuck like me?"

"In the same dizzy fix you are," said Waring. "Only I'm the messenger boy from dear old London instead of Paris. It seems if you've got any kind of a decent training-school record they make a courier or a door-opener of you around a headquarters."

He fell silent as they passed into Colonel Pennington's office. The colonel went straight to the desk and sat down while his companions clustered around him. Pennington frowned and extended a handful of papers.

"Your maps, Major Barlow. A clever devil, that Boche, and superbly made up. Nobody around here knew him particularly well and he had every chance to get away with the stuff. Now, what's this?"

Bending closer he stared at document after document.

"Poor Trent's papers to identify him. Not much doubt but that this Boche was in on the gang that killed him. And these?"

In puzzlement the colonel inspected several sheets of rough paper on which sketches appeared. The others edged nearer and Waring found himself looking down at the sheets as Pennington spread them out.

From one of them stared up the picture of the most evil face he had ever seen. It was that of a German with a flying helmet pulled low over thick eyebrows and eyes that glared like those of some wild animal. The mouth was thin and cruel, set like a trap.

"That Boche spy could draw," mused Pennington. "These look like spare time sketches done for his own pleasure. Not a line to tell what they're of. Here's a good one of a plane in flight and a landscape. And some rough stuff, hardly blocked out."

A thrill of excitement spread through Steve's fibres. He was studying the rough,

unfinished sketch. Even in its crude shape he recognized it for what it was.

"That's the start of a picture of one of the Scarlet Bats," he blurted out. "It's just the sort of thing I saw over the Channel. It isn't a plane and it isn't a projectile. Lord knows what it is. But I have hell's own hunch, sir, that this Boche came from the base of the Bats. May I see the landscape?"

WITH eager fingers he picked up the sheet and scanned it. Bleak and grim a tall mountain rose above the waters of a river. A half-ruined castle perched on its crest. It was a superb sketch, splendidly done and somehow sinister. Abruptly Waring's eyes narrowed and his voice quivered as he laid down the sheet.

"Look at that tiny apparatus sticking up from the roof of the castle. It's a wireless aerial, colonel, or looks very much like it. Don't you see what that Boche spy was doing to amuse himself? He was sketching people and scenes near or at his drome. We know the wireless is there nearby. But how"—an accent of despair crept into his voice—"how in blazes do we identify this sketch of a broken-down castle on a mountain?"

Every face turned toward him for an instant and Colonel Pennington's fist came crashing down on the desk.

"I think you're right, Lieutenant Waring!" he exclaimed. "The spy came from the Scarlet Bats. Now we've got to get all the forces of Intelligence to work to ferret out the location of this mountain. And that may take weeks when we may only have days at our command before this accursed menace strikes again."

"It'll take just two seconds." A cheerful voice spoke. "I know where that mountain is."

Colonel Pennington stared in amazement at Spike Barton who coolly picked

up the picture, glanced at it again and laid it down.

"I thought so," said Spike. "That's Schloss Gruber on the Rhine, a good hundred miles inside the German frontier. You see, colonel, I took two walking trips through Germany before the war and I covered plenty of ground. I'll swear gladly to the identity of that place."

An exclamation of relief broke from the colonel.

"Now we're getting somewhere! Tell me everything you can about the locale, Lieutenant Barton. Where would the drome be?"

Spike shook his head.

"It would have to be miles away. The entire country around the *Schloss* is mountainous and wooded. No field could ever be established there. But that's just a rough outline. I was only passing by."

"There will have to be a reconnaissance of the castle," said Colonel Pennington, his face grave with thought. "And no squadron sent a hundred miles into Germany by daylight would ever get back. Yet it's got to be tried."

He fell silent, thoughtfully tapping his fingers on the desk.

"No, on second thought that plan is useless. A reconnaissance in force would only warn the Scarlet Bats, if they are there, and they could shift their base in a matter of hours. I'll drop a couple of agents over the lines close to Schloss Gruber tonight. Captain Branch! Get me the list of our Number One agents."

Instinctively Waring stiffened and a tiny pulse beat in his forehead.

"Colonel," he said in a level voice, "haven't Lieutenant Barton and myself won the right to be the agents you send over? I'm the only person who has seen the Bats, and Barton knows the *Schloss*. Two flyers could get through Germany unseen and land close enough to the castle to investigate it. Send us over tonight and

we'll be back in twenty-four hours with the dope or else—" his tones were grim—"we won't be back at all."

For a long, tense moment Colonel Pennington studied the pair of flyers. His eyes went grim.

"I'm afraid you won't be back at all," he said. "But you can go. Take off at midnight."

CHAPTER THREE

Death Castle

A SHARP rap at the door of the courier's barracks roused Waring from deep sleep. "Order from Colonel Pennington to report to H. Q." announced the orderly, stepping into the room.

"We'll be there," answered Steve. He rolled off his bunk, fully clothed, and roused Spike who was snoring on the adjoining cot.

"Wake up, Spike, old scout. We've laid in all the sleep we'll have for a long, long time."

"Right," grinned Barton and thrust a crumpled cigarette into his mouth. "And we won't have much chance for a smoke either inside Germany. Better ruin your lungs while you've still got the opportunity."

Together they strode out of the barracks and made for the headquarters building nearby. In front of it stood a long, powerful staff motor with four stars on its windshield.

As they came nearer the door was flung open and a stalwart, commanding figure strode out. The Commander-in-Chief, Waring noticed excitedly and stopped in his tracks, ten feet from the car. His hand went up in salute. The C.-in-C. did not even see him. He stepped into the waiting car, accompanied by a pair of aides, and it rushed off at full speed, vanishing far down the road in the moonlight. A second car was parked nearby.

"This way, lieutenants," bit out the voice of Colonel Pennington. He had come out of the building and signaled to the motor which drew up in front of him.

"We're off for the drome." Waring and Barton hopped in and settled themselves. The colonel's face wore a look of deep thought as the car rolled along. "You saw the C.-in-C. leave, I suppose? That means something is up somewhere. He's usually at H. Q. until all hours of the night."

Waring nodded. The tingle of adventure was running through him. At last he was off on a mission of peril, instead of holding down a non-combatant job in a dull headquarters. The motor ran onto the flying field and pulled up close to a brand new two-seater that stood on the deadline.

"Here we are," broke out Pennington. "The sooner you men get into the air the better. There's no advice of any kind I can give you. You'll have to go it alone."

He held out his hand and Steve gripped it. Then Colonel Pennington's head went up and an amazed look came into his face.

"What's that?" he asked sharply, staring into the moonlit heights.

From far away at first, but growing closer every instant, came a screaming, whirring sound. It rose and fell weirdly. Steve gasped and seized the colonel by the arm, pointing.

"There they are! See them coming hell-bent for election? It's the Scarlet Bats!"

Out of the silvery arch, whirling earthward at terrific speed, drove six glistening shapes. They veered and curved, straightened out and hurtled on. Far ahead of the other five swept one of them.

"God!" broke out Pennington. "They're pointing for H. Q!"

EVEN as he spoke the first shape crashed into the roof of the building and a frightful blast of flame erupted.

Men poured out of the structure in a flood, running for their lives.

In crash after crash the following Bats struck and the building blew apart with orange-crimson flame leaping from the ruins.

All over the vicinity rose the quick blasts of anti-aircraft guns shooting into the skies, and the long yellow lances of the searchlights thrust up into the heights.

For miles the searchlights roved and swept but found no target. No wings hovered there—nothing. Tensely Colonel Pennington surveyed the scene of ruin while the guns roared and the flames of the burning building lit the night.

"Do you see what has happened?" he said harshly. "The Scarlet Bats meant to get the C.-in-C.! It was just a matter of luck that he left the building early tonight. If they had come half an hour previously the A. E. F. would be without a leader and the war might well be lost."

He raised his hand to his forehead and wiped away the drops of cold sweat that lay there. His voice became even more grim.

"This means the life of the C.-in-C. is in peril every hour from now on! In an ordinary bombing raid it's almost impossible to hit the target but not one of those Bats missed the building. It's uncanny! It's horrible!"

"We must have lost scores of men, trapped in the building before they could get out. Waring and Barton, jump into that plane! Go after those Bats!"

"Yes, sir," bit out Steve.

He put his foot in the stirrup of the two-seater, and hurled himself in behind the controls. A mechanic, pale-faced and shaking, moved to the propeller and swung it. The motor, already warmed up, burst into life almost at once.

Steve flung a glance behind him that showed Spike Barton settled in the rear nest. His hand went to the throttle and

opened it. In a roar of power the crate rushed forward along the level turf and leaped into the air.

Waring leaned forward with narrowed eyes, studying the heights while he sent the ship racing upward in a gradual zoom. At the ceiling occasional clouds drifted, veiling the face of the high-riding, shimmering moon.

Somehow Waring had a hunch that there was some terrible danger awaiting them in that sky.

The wind blew keenly on his face as the two-seater scaled on. Then it plunged into the woolly mist, rushed through banks of blinding vapor for a moment, and burst out into the clear, starry arch.

Waring leveled off and thrust on even more power. The miles were rolling out behind his rudder and it would not be long before he would be streaking over the flaming line of the Front.

"Test your m. g.," he said quietly into the phones. "We may be running into action any minute."

"There she goes," returned Spike cheerfully. The crackle of the quick-firer in the rear broke out. Steve pressed the stick trigger of his own guns and they flared into flame.

"All set," he muttered grimly.

Below him ran a long zigzag line of fire, marking the line of the trenches where men hurled death at each other night and day. For four long years war had roared on a three-hundred mile line from the English Channel to Switzerland. Not yet had a decision been reached. A quiver of apprehension passed through Waring's fibres as his mind went back over the last twenty-four hours.

"If the Bats can't be located and blown off the map the war may not last another month," he told himself. "The Germans will win it hands down. Even G. H. Q. has the wind up now. Well, Spike and I can only do our best."

Once more he spoke into the phones. "Keep your weather-eye peeled, Spike. We're in German air and we've got a hell of a long run ahead of us."

"Don't I know it?" returned Spike. "Wish I'd brought along a copy of *La Vie Parisienne* to read. Don't worry, Steve, I'll cover your tail."

Time passed while the two-seater scudded on its way into the north. It was traveling at the highest velocity that Waring could jam out of it. Wind sang in its struts and wires and the noise of the motor was a steady roar of power.

Now and then he reached into the flap of the cockpit and drew out a pair of long-range night glasses. For miles now he had been following the silver ribbon of the River Rhine.

"Getting fairly close, Spike," he called. "I'm going for altitude these last twenty miles and then come down."

Back came the stick and the crate lifted. At fifteen-thousand feet he flattened out and went hurtling along. Out of the distance ahead, misty in the moonlit sky, appeared a blur. Steve lifted the glasses again while a puzzled frown creased his forehead. Somehow he tingled all over.

He wondered what it was. It couldn't have been a drifting cloud because he was not getting any nearer to it. His plane could not go a mile faster than that mysterious blur.

He leaned forward, scanning the strange bulk. Then he caught the voice of Spike coming through the phones.

"Get off to the east a little more, Steve. The old *Schloss* is coming close and there's no place to land near it."

"In a minute," answered Waring.

The big blot was closer. The Spad was catching up to it. Also it seemed to be dropping, sinking through the sky. He meant to have a look at it before trying for a perilous landing.

"Is it a plane?" he murmured. "If it is it's the biggest thing ever made."

On he rushed and the dim outline became clearer. Suddenly a rocket flared out from the blur and burst in a string of crimson balls. The surface of the great wide river thousands of feet below burst into light where torches played instantly across the water.

AND in that same moment a lance of light bored in the rear from the moving, dropping shape and struck blindingly into Steve's eyes. Instinctively he flung up his hand to shield his sight and the two-seater lurched sickeningly downward.

Flame burst out in front of him and a cyclone of whizzing lead went tearing past the ship. With a desperate wrench he flung it back onto an even keel but it was too late. Smashing, tearing, slicing, the merciless torrent of metal plunged into the plane.

He heard a strut go and another. Somewhere a wire snapped and like a crippled bird the ship began to drop.

His heart leaped and pounded in panic as the crate plummeted downward. The long beams of searchlights caught it once, twice, and then lost it while it plunged to destruction through the silvered murk. Over and over it whirled with its engine mute and its wings cracking.

"Fini!" muttered Steve. He steadied his voice and spoke through the phone. "So long, Spike old scout. The war is over for us."

Sickeningly the plane turned over and Steve was flung from side to side in his safety belt.

"Wait till we hit the dirt," came back Spike's voice and Waring knew that he was grinning in the face of extinction. "Can't you see, Steve, we're over the river? By God, we've got a chance! Pan-cake the crate!"

"If I can!" gasped Steve. Frantically

he wrestled with the controls and for an instant the ship righted. Down below him, not three hundred feet away, flowed the waters of the wide stream.

"God!" he panted. "There is a chance!"

He shoved the stick forward and braced himself, fighting to drop at an angle. The ruined plane shuddered and pitched down. But its nose was coming up while all Steve's flying skill kept its wings level.

"Rip off your belt!" he shouted to Spike and his free hand tore away his own.

"Jump!"

He flung himself over the cockpit rim and felt himself falling through space, feet first. The river rushed up to meet him and he struck, plunging far beneath the surface.

Up he came and made a few strong strokes that brought him to the wing of the wrecked ship. It still floated but it would not stay up more than a few minutes more. He wiped the water from his eyes and looked around. Up from the water bobbed a helmeted head, twenty yards away.

"Spike!" he exclaimed with a rush of relief. "You made it, too!"

"Sure did," panted Spike, coming hand over hand up to the plane and clinging on. "But I swallowed plenty water. And there wasn't any cognac to go with it either. Where are we?"

Steve half-floated on his side and sent his gaze upward. To his right rose a frowning, beetling cliff, two hundred yards away, and on the summit of it, outlined against the stars he made out the ruined *Schloss*. Then across the water, rushing in a yellow flood came the light of a great torch. It caught the sinking two-seater full.

"Down!" crackled Steve. "Get under water and swim for the shore. If they see us we won't live five minutes."

Up the river a gun crashed and a geyser of water leaped next to the crate.

Again came an explosion and a shell whistled over Steve's head.

"They've bracketed the crate with a cannon, Spike!" he shouted. "*Allez!*"

He thrust himself under the water and struck out with all his strength. Yard after yard he fought his way beneath the surface until his lungs seemed bursting. For an instant he came up, caught a breath of air and then went under again.

Crash after crash was resounding from the hidden gun and in a sudden burst the wreckage of the two-seater vanished beneath the water. The searchlight roved aimlessly to and fro and went out. Steve floated for a moment, feeling the slow tug of the current, and then caught sight of Spike not far off.

"Straight for the bank," he called softly.

With deliberate strokes he swam on, saving his strength. Presently the steep cliff of the shore rose above his head and he let his feet down. They touched bottom and he waded out and sat on the tiny belt of rocks and gravel that bordered the precipice.

He lifted his head and drew in great, deep breaths of refreshing air. On the river sounded the clicking of oarlocks and he caught sight of a boat, filled with men, coming down the stream. The moonlight glinted on the bayonets of Mausers.

"Out to inspect the wreck, if any," he husked. "We hauled out just in time, Spike."

Barton who had reached the shore at his side, nodded.

"The crate is at the bottom of the river by now," he said. "Those shells didn't leave anything of it. The Boches will think we went down with it, if we lived. And what they don't know won't hurt them."

"Right," agreed Steve. He stood up, flexing his muscles, and feeling renewed strength run through his tired frame.

"But we can't stay here, Spike. We've got to keep moving." His eyes strayed along the belt of shore. "Come along, Spike. Try and find some place where we can scale this cliff."

TOGETHER they rose and cautiously began to make their way among the small boulders. The wall of cliff curved abruptly and as they rounded it Steve broke out in an exclamation of hope.

They had come onto a wider stretch, almost a beach, where a plank landing had been laid. Narrow steps ran zigzag up the wall of the precipice with a hand-rail alongside them. Steve craned his neck, staring upward but he could see nothing but the starry sky.

"We can't tell what's up yonder," he said. "What's the difference. The *Schloss* must be there and that's what we came here to investigate. We might as well get bumped off up there as down here where we'll be found as soon as daylight comes. Still got your gun?"

"Yes," returned Spike.

"Then keep it ready. Up with you."

Steve swung onto the steps and began to follow them. On and on he climbed. Now and then he glanced down at the river far below. The cliff was dizzying in its height and his head swam.

"Lots different from piloting a crate in the sky," he murmured.

"I guess I'm not a mountain climber. Good God, what's that?"

Across the river the opposite cliff-wall seemed to break apart in a glow of blazing light at its base. It vanished in a second and he rubbed his eyes in utter incredulity.

"I'm going cuckoo," he rasped. "Nothing like that could have happened. But then nothing could have happened like the things that have been going on since I left London. Did you see that, Spike?"

"I didn't see a damn thing," grunted

Barton. He paused, resting against the railing. "It takes a mountain goat to get up this stair. I'm using my lungs for it and not my eyes."

Steve made no answer but went on ascending. The steps came suddenly out on a circular landing cut into the rock. A subdued scuffle sounded in the dark space. Steve's grip tightened on his gun.

"Where in blazes are we now?" asked Barton, scrambling up the last step and standing at his side.

"Halt!" crashed a voice in German. "Gott, it is a voice in English!"

Out of the murk flashed the glint of steel as a bayonet lanced at Steve's breast. He twitched aside instinctively as the blade sheared through the side of his loose coverall, and the Boche, plunging on, came breast to breast against him. Then Waring's hand went up, clutching his Colt, and he struck with all his force, aiming for the top of the German's head.

Steel met bone with a deadly thud and the Boche dropped, collapsing in a limp heap. Steve stepped forward a pace or so over the body, every muscle tense, straining his eyes in the gloom. A sigh of relief came from him. No other bayonets drove at him out of the dark and no shots smashed.

"The Boche was alone," he said quietly. "A Boche with a bayoneted Mauser means a sentry. What was he guarding? Not the stairway because he was yards away from it."

Slowly his eyes became accustomed to the darkness as he advanced across the landing. A faint slit of light suddenly came into his vision. A few strides more and, reaching out, his hand felt cold metal.

It was pierced in a narrow loophole at the height of his head and he pressed his face close to the door. He was staring into a narrow passageway where dim electric lights burned in the ceiling. Grop-

ing, his fingers met and closed on a handle.

"The sentry was stationed in front of this entrance," he told Spike with a thrill of excitement in his voice. "That means something worth guarding is behind the door. How's your curiosity, Spike?"

"When I was a kid they used to tell me that curiosity killed a cat," returned Barton cheerfully. "Now maybe it's going to kill a couple of Yanks. I'm with you, Steve. I always want to know what's behind doors."

WARING gave a twist to the handle, drew back with a wrench, and slowly, soundlessly, the heavy metal door came open.

He and Spike stepped into the passageway and the portal swung closed behind them. For a full minute they held their position, ears alive for any sound. From far away, muffled by the rock, drifted a faint, continuous clattering.

"Sounds like a flock of machine guns in action," suggested Spike. "But what would m.g.'s be doing down inside a precipice?"

Another minute they listened and then Steve made a decisive gesture. Nothing would be gained by waiting any longer.

"We're going ahead," he rasped. "In these sloppy coveralls we may be able to pass for Germans and again we may not. Anyhow, we both speak the damn language."

He strode forward, marching steadily along the passage that had been hewn through the living rock. It was old, centuries old perhaps, and the dust lay thick on its floor.

"It runs under the *Schloss*," reasoned Steve. "The *Schloss* must have been built Lord knows how long ago. All those old, ruined castles have all kinds of under-

ground ways. But this one has been modernized for war."

On they went and the mysterious clattering sound became louder and louder. It beat in Waring's ears, almost deafening him. As the passage widened, and close at hand, a great blaze of light sprang up. For an instant he raised his hands to shield his eyes and then dropped them. He took a few paces forward and stalked through an open door. He felt Spike's fingers grip his arm in excitement.

"What inferno have we walked into?" panted Barton. "These people look like devils out of hell."

On all sides of them in a great, high-ceilinged chamber hewn out of the stones, moved men with queer white hoods of coarse cloth thrown over their heads. Through glass eyepieces set in the hoods their eyes flared sinisterly. A terrible tumult filled the place and flame leaped from objects held in the hands of the hooded men.

"Look!" whispered Steve. For a moment he had been shaken utterly by the scene before him but now he had recovered. He was watching the gnome-like figures working at odd and glistening shapes, pressing their tools against sides of metal. "They're welding and riveting. We've found the nest where the Scarlet Bats are being made. Those are the Bats under construction."

Stealthily he moved away from the door and pressed himself against the wall. Under the hands of the workmen the Bats were taking shape.

He saw a strangely small wing clamped in place on one of the projectiles and men with rivet guns and torches bent over it, driving in the bolts that held it fast. Nothing could be heard in the vast chamber but the fiendish clamor of the machines.

At least sixty men were busied about the place, moving under huge electric arcs set overhead. Other electric lamps were

placed on platforms, brought up over the glistening shapes. Strange shadows wavered over the floor, the figures of the workers enlarged to gigantic size. Slowly Steve's eyes strayed about the chamber.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Floating Drome

TWO men were coming toward them two weird, hooded shapes holding iron bars in their hands. Steve went cold all over and tightened his grip on his Colt. There seemed an infinite menace in the advance of the pair of Boches.

"Don't show your gun till the last minute," he whispered to Spike. "Then shoot like hell."

In another second a tiny sigh of relief escaped him and his nerves relaxed. The Boches were not coming for them. They were turning aside, walking to a long wooden bench that stood next to the wall. First one of them and then the other stripped off his hood and flung it carelessly on the bench. Their tools followed.

"Ach, that was a long day!" growled the biggest of them. His broad stupid face flushed angrily. "But then that devil von Lanzmann drives us like so many slaves. Fourteen hours a day in this hell-hole. It is too cursed much even if they tell us that victory for the Vaterland is near. We have heard that before."

"Cease your eternal grumbling," rejoined the other German. "A few glasses of *schnapps* and you will talk a different tune. Have you not heard the rumors that are going around the *Schloss*? The Bats that we help to make sank a whole fleet of English battleships and transports. They have killed the American commander-in-chief. Why should we care if we labor overtime when we are aiding in such glorious achievements?"

The speaker moved off across the cham-

ber with his companion still grumbling at his side. Steve stepped forward warily and reached the bench. His hand shot out and seized one of the white, glass-lensed hoods.

"Quick!" he husked to Barton. "Get the other one over your head. Then follow that pair of Boches. The big one is as sore as a boil. And when a man is sore he'll talk. We're going to take a chance."

Swiftly they went after the Boches and caught up to them at the side of the room. Steve reached out and tapped the grumbler on the shoulder. The German turned, his stupid features snarling.

"Tell me, my friend," said Steve in flawless German. "How do I get up into the *Schloss*? My comrade and I are new workers here."

"The more ill luck to you," snarled the Boche surlily. "You will have long hours and no overtime in pay. The way to the *Schloss*? Come along with us if you do not mind climbing. We have been called up to make some repairs in the wireless room."

He turned his back oafishly and swaggered across the floor. Steve cast a swift glance at Spike, who nodded, and together they trailed the pair of Germans. The chance had been taken and they had won.

All around them the hooded workers smashed away with their riveting tools and their welders. They marched through a pandemonium of light and sound, unheeded.

Presently they reached the far side of the great chamber and began to mount a set of metal stairs that ended in a long gallery. Their surly guide did not even glance back at them. They reached the gallery, went along it and suddenly the big Boche disappeared in a doorway. Once more they confronted stairs but these were of cold stone, winding upward through a wide shaft.

"I'm beginning to get the layout of this place," reasoned Steve. "What we've just left, the workshop of the Scarlet Bats, must have been the old dungeons. Their walls have been knocked out to form one great chamber. You couldn't find a more ideal secret factory anywhere. And now we're being led straight to the new wireless station. Cripes, what a break!"

The stairway was dark and again and again he stumbled. His hand went up and stripped off the hood.

"These Boches we are with are our passports," he whispered to Spike as they climbed on upward.

It seemed that they had been mounting stairs for an eternity. Then they came out onto a landing and the surly Boche flung aside a blanket that shielded a door. From beyond it came the harsh crackle of a powerful wireless in full blast.

Steve passed into a circular chamber with walls and flooring of stone. Across the room, against the wall, an operator crouched over a wireless receiving set, scribbling hastily on a pad. The racket of the apparatus ceased and the man whirled around.

"*Teufel!*" he rasped. "Who are you?"

"The workmen to make the repairs," grated the big Boche.

"I don't need four healthy men to do the work of two!" jeered the wireless man. He had a thin, vicious face that writhed maliciously. "But I want a messenger or so. My assistant is down below filling himself with food when he is most needed. The fool should have been back half an hour ago. Now I have this message for Major von Lanzmann from Spa marked 'Urgent.'"

The thrill of sudden inspiration swept through Steve. He reached out his hand, advancing across the room to the desk.

"I will take the message to the major," he said quietly. "Such a thing should not be allowed to wait."

"I'd lose my job and maybe my neck if I held up von Lanzmann," remarked the operator grimly.

He held out the yellow blank and Waring folded it and thrust it into his pocket.

"Better get to his headquarters as fast as you can travel," the operator continued. "Up to the roof there—" he pointed toward spiral stairs close by— "down to the landing by the hoisting net and then get the guard to shoot you across the river on the cable car." The operator jabbed a tobacco-stained forefinger at the big workman. "Do you know how to run the hoist?"

"Ja," answered the Boche. "I almost broke my back on it once."

"Then send these men down and on their way. After that you can attend to the work I wanted you for."

The brawny German emitted a disgusted oath and shouldered his way to the stairs and up them. Steve and Spike followed, emerging onto the roof in a flood of clear moonlight. They stood on the top of a tall tower, hundreds of feet in the sky, it seemed. Near the broken-down parapet stood a crane with a big net loosely spread beneath it.

"Get into that net," rapped their guide. "It's used to lift apparatus and heavy material up to the tower. I'll fix the rest."

WARILY Steve sat down in the center of the netting. An instant later, when its loose sides had been fastened to the crane, there came a grunt from the Boche who was pulling on a lever, and the arm of the crane swung outward. Dizzy and panicky, Steve looked down into a terrific gulf of emptiness with the river showing like a ribbon beneath. The netting swung sickeningly, going down. He and Spike were tumbled together, all arms and legs.

"Cripes, what a shock!" gasped Spike.

"Is that damn Boche going to drop us in the river?"

Down lurched the netting, riding more evenly now. The wall of the tower drifted past and then there came a bump. The netting had landed on solid rock. Its sides fell apart and the two Yanks scrambled up and out onto a square landing. The head of the big Boche appeared over the parapet.

"Are you all right down there?" he shouted.

"Yes," called back Steve. With a creaking sound machinery started and the netting swung off the rock and, hanging loosely, began to ascend. It went rapidly up the side of the tower and vanished from view as the arm of the crane swung inward above the parapet.

"Who are you?" snarled a rough voice.

Steve started. A pair of Boches crouched by a machine gun, set up at the river edge of the landing glared suspiciously under the rims of their hod helmets. One of them stood up and fingered the pistol at his hip.

"Two of von Lanzmann's flyers taking a message to him," returned Waring instantly. He let a note of arrogance creep into his voice. "Show us the way to his headquarters."

The Boche pointed to one side.

"Get into that cable car. It will take you across the river. As a flyer you should know how to run its motor."

"I see," rapped Steve. He and Spike came forward and stared at the low-slung car, resembling the fuselage of a plane. It hung on a strong steel cable that stretched out above the gulf.

"Get aboard, comrade," he ordered Spike.

A moment later they were in the carrier and Steve put his hand to the throttle. Ahead of him lay empty space with the dim bulk of the mountain opposite the

Schloss looming in the distance. His hand moved and the motor began to purr.

With a tiny jerk the cable car started, swaying from side to side. The *Schloss* faded out behind and they rolled on at a terrific height above the river. Steve kept the speed of the car down and reached into his pocket for the yellow message blank that the wireless operator had handed to him. In the sheen of the moonlight its lines stood out clearly.

"Damn!" he exploded. "I might have known it would be in code!"

He was looking at a mass of meaningless letters and numerals, crowded together in a single unbroken paragraph. It would take a cipher expert hours to break down the mystery of its contents. Angrily he thrust the paper back into his pocket and sent the car into higher speed.

Then abruptly he eased it up. Below him on the surface of the river a sheen of yellow light shot out. It reached the length of a tremendous platform, halfway out. In the clear glow he discerned the shapes of a dozen planes and an outbuilding or so.

"Good Lord," he gasped. "It's a floating landing field in the middle of the river! Spike!"

Instinctively he shut off the power and the cable car dangled, motionless, on its wire high above the river. Spike leaned from his seat in the rear and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Listen!" he urged. "It's a crate coming down!"

Out of the moonlight with its motor still throbbing glided a fleet, winged shape. The motor went off as it dropped and at a gradual angle it headed for the platform. Then its wheels struck the boards and it taxied along to a stop, full in the glare of the floodlight.

Steve could see men running from all directions toward the ship. They stopped and stiffened in a rank close beside it.

From the rear cockpit of the plane—a two-seater—a figure alighted. Waring opened the throttle of the carrier and slowly it picked up speed.

"We've seen all we want to," he called back to Spike. "This *Schloss* and its vicinity must be a perfect nest of ships. It's up to us to go on and get into von Lanzmann's headquarters as fast as we can."

The cable car rolled forward beneath the overhead wire that supported it and the walls of the cliff opposite the *Schloss* came closer and closer. On the river the floodlight had gone off but other tiny lights now darted to and fro at the platform.

"Steady," warned Spike. "We're almost there."

The cable car jounced and left the gulf of empty air. It ran onto a landing in the cliff as Waring turned off the power. They stepped out onto the rock, facing two more guards who sat at a Maxim.

"The headquarters of Major von Lanzmann," ripped out Steve.

One of the Boche jerked his thumb toward a black opening in the cliff.

"Down there," he pointed.

Waring and Barton moved quickly across the landing and found themselves facing an elevator hoist. They stepped into it and Steve tugged at the lever. Slowly, and then with increasing speed, the hoist moved downward. An oil lantern guttered on its floor, casting weird shadows on the sides of the shaft.

Suddenly a white-painted blotch appeared on the rock with the words "Go slowly" painted on it in big black letters. Steve manipulated the lever, the hoist slowed up and stopped with a bump.

"We've arrived," he said huskily to Spike. "Just where I don't know. But this is as far as we go."

Feeling for the Colt in his pocket he advanced into a square room. On its walls

hung a variety of clothing, rough overalls and aviators' kit. A row of helmets hung on pegs. Steve moved forward and lifted one, studying the insignia that was painted on its front.

"It's a Bat," he said quietly. "Slip a helmet on, Spike, and goggles. We're fixed. We've come to the right place."

Masked and helmeted, they stared at each other and grinned. A surge of recklessness passed through Steve. Garbed in the real Bats' helmets and with their shapeless coveralls practically indistinguishable from the German type, they looked the part of Boche flyers.

Steve motioned toward an arched door that lay nearby. He could hear the sound of voices beyond its curtain. They passed to the doorway and through the covering which swished softly down behind them. And then Waring stood rigid, every muscle in him frozen by sheer astonishment.

"God!" he gasped. "What have we walked into? A secret airport!"

"Look at that flying boat!" said Spike hoarsely. "It's the biggest thing in the world!"

CHAPTER FIVE

Suicide Staffel

SPIKE and Steve stood on an embankment of rock that extended on three sides of what seemed to be a huge lake, running back into the mountain. Great arclights sent a flood of blazing white illumination down on the water.

Out in the middle of the lake, riding easily on pontoons and moored by ropes to the ceiling, lay the most tremendous flying craft that Steve had ever looked upon. Its vastness appalled him.

The wings, with an array of motors fastened on them, stretched out far above the water like gigantic arms. The fuselage seemed endless in its length. It could hold an army of men. All over the body

of the ship moved mechanics and workmen. A small host of other workmen were busy on the embankment which held buildings and piles of materials.

"So this is the war craft the Boches have been hiding," muttered Steve.

He straightened to attention as a heavily-built officer in a captain's uniform strode toward him from a group of men who were gathered about the door of a wooden shack some ten yards away. His hand went up in a stiff German salute.

"Where can I find Major von Lanzmann, *Kapitan*?" he inquired.

The captain glared at him.

"No one is permitted to see Major von Lanzmann. He is aboard his ship and has given orders that he is not to be disturbed. You want to know why, I suppose? Then look yonder to the river."

Steve turned slightly and his eyes followed the pointing finger of the officer. He saw opposite him a wall of rock that hemmed the lake in on the river side. The next instant the wall rolled apart and he was gazing out onto the moonlit surface of the water.

The small eye of a searchlight, mounted on the front of a boat, cut the gloom, and the soft chug-chugging of a motor sounded in his ears. Instinctively he suppressed a gasp. He realized now that the entire outer wall of the lake was nothing but a canvas curtain which could be swept aside on a moment's notice.

Through the gap that had been made the motorboat shouldered steadily, reducing its speed to a mere crawl. In the stern sat a portly, blue-cloaked figure and dimly Steve sensed that it was the man whom he had seen alighting from the plane on the landing platform in the center of the river. A sarcastic smile edged the lips of the captain.

"Now, you will understand why no mere *Lieutenant* is allowed to see Major von Lanzmann," rasped the captain. "He

is awaiting the call of Admiral von Klurg, the chief naval officer of the High Command at Spa, who arrived only a few minutes ago and who has been awaited for the last three hours. Major von Lanzmann will go into council with him aboard the mother ship—a broad-fingered hand gestured toward the winged monster that rocked on the water in the cove—"and they will be together for hours, no doubt."

Slowly the motorboat made its way over the smooth water until it rested beneath one of the great wings. From the fuselage of the gigantic ship a slim steel ladder fell, its end hauled in by one of the crew of the boat.

The admiral seized hold of the ladder and went up it, step by step, while it swung from side to side beneath his weight. His blue-cloaked form vanished through a door that opened quickly in the side of the fuselage.

Then the motorboat crew bent to their work; the engine thrummed and the boat itself turned on its prow and went nosing out toward the moonlit sheen of the river. As it passed beyond the edge of the cliff, the canvas curtains fell and once again Steve stared at blank wall.

"Cripes!" he told himself. "It's a masterpiece of camouflage!"

His head came up and he gave back the German captain stare for stare. The yellow blank that had been in his pocket now showed in his hand. "I beg the pardon of the *Kapitan*," he rasped. "But my companion and myself have just come from the wireless station at the *Schloss*. We have an urgent message for Major von Lanzmann. It is from Spa."

"From Spa?" repeated the captain. A curious look came into his eyes. "That is quite a different matter, *Leutnant*, I shall see to it that you are put aboard the ship directly. *Achtung!*" he roared to a pair of officers at the shack door, "a boat

for these *Leutnants*. They carry a message for the commander." The captain bowed to Steve. "You will find the landing yonder. My aides will attend to everything."

"I thank you, *Kapitan*," said Waring coolly.

He and Barton walked along the embankment and down to a small stage where already a rowboat waited. They stepped into its stern without a word. The rowers bent to their oars and sent the craft scud-ding over the water for the huge airship.

The great wings cast their shadow over Steve's head, there came a hail and the rowers shipped their oars. The steel ladder hung next to Waring, hardly more than a foot or so from the gunwale. He rose and, grasping it, made his way upward. Behind him Spike climbed, muttering suppressed curses as his foot slipped.

With a final haul Steve reached the top of a yard-wide landing, drew himself erect and passed through a low door into the fuselage of the huge aircraft. For a moment he stood quietly, surveying the scene.

A VAST cabin stretched out before him with room in it for at least fifty men. At its far end sat the admiral, facing a Boche in flyer's kit. Involuntarily, Steve shuddered at the sight of von Lanzmann's tight-lipped, pale and savage face.

His eyes were like slits in his head. Lounging in his chair with a tiger-like grace he was talking in low tones to the admiral. Abruptly he broke off as he caught the sound of Waring's entrance and glared across the space that separated them.

"Who are you?" he snarled. "*Teufel!* I have given orders not to be disturbed. Get out of here, you wooden heads!"

Steve saluted, feigning the quick nervousness of a subordinate in the presence

of an angry superior officer. Instantly he held out the cipher message.

"From Spa, *Excellenz*," he said. "A wireless that came in at the *Schloss* station."

"And what were you doing across the river at the *Schloss*?" A vicious gleam came into von Lanzmann's eyes. They bored deep into Steve. "Do you not know that my picked flyers live here in this headquarters? What are you, the new replacements from Staffel 42?"

"Yes, *Excellenz*," said Steve. He moved in an embarrassed manner. "We trust you will forgive us. We have just arrived and went to the wrong side of the river."

"*Gott!*" snarled von Lanzmann. "I asked for flyers with brains. If you have not got them, and plenty of courage, I do not want you." He took the message and laid it on the table but he did not look at it at once. His gaze still fastened ominously on Waring and when he spoke it was in cool, deadly accents.

"You would not be here with me unless both of you had volunteered for a deed of glory which means suicide. Do you both realize that?"

"Yes, *Excellenz*," answered Steve. His fists clenched and he fought hard to keep down a shudder that ran through him. In the basilisk stare of von Lanzmann, in his icy tones lay a frightful, mysterious menace. "We realize it fully."

Von Lanzmann toyed with the message, his long tapering fingers slowly opening it.

"Cipher," he said curtly. "*Kapitan Helm!*" A dapper officer appeared instantly from behind a curtain that cloaked a doorway. "Take this to the decoding officer. I want it in clear immediately."

The aide vanished and von Lanzmann turned to the square-faced, gray-haired admiral.

"I hope it is the order we are looking

for, admiral. Your policy of submarine warfare may have failed but I can promise you an overwhelming success by my new method. You know what happened to those transports in the Channel."

"I do, von Lanzmann," rumbled the admiral. His eyes shot fire. "It was a splendid deed. What are the lives of your thirteen men against such a destruction of the cursed Allies?"

"That is not all," grated von Lanzmann. "Tonight I myself took over the Bats and raided Chaumont. I think that within a few hours we shall have news from our agents of the destruction of the American C.-in-C."

"*Gott im Himmel!*" roared the admiral. "What a blow!"

"I operated on my own initiative in that case," said von Lanzmann. "It was partially out of a desire for revenge. One of my best men, *Kapitan Bohme*, went over to the Yankee G.H.Q. early in the day to obtain plans of their sector. He was in London on the espionage detail which did away with the American Intelligence officer, Captain Trent, and obtained the information on the transports which we strafed.

"It so happened that he looks a good deal like Captain Trent and volunteered to go over, disguised as that officer, and obtain the information. He has not come back. He was caught and killed, I am positive. Therefore, it seemed fitting to me to strike back at the Yankee C.-in-C.

"I took this boat in which we are now sitting and my Bats and set out. We were back here in a little over two hours. That is, I and my crew returned. The Scarlet Bats naturally, did not return. They merely did their duty. Admiral, in this craft I have fashioned a weapon against which the Allies are defenseless! It will bring certain victory to the *Vaterland!*"

The admiral's features grew hard and

exultant. His back stiffened and one hand went to his spiked junker moustache, twisting it.

"I have always had the utmost confidence in you, von Lanzmann. And so have the rest of the high command at Spa. Now you have given definite proof of the destructive value of your invention. I myself have come here to inspect it, following the receipt of the news of your spectacular exploit against the transports in the Channel."

"Good!" exclaimed von Lanzmann. "Nothing will give me greater pleasure than to take you on a tour of inspection of this great craft. And then I shall entertain you with an unusual sight. I shall show you how our brave German flyers gamble with their lives."

He turned his head for a moment and stared once more at Waring and Barton. His brow was clouded and stormy.

"What, you are still here?" he demanded harshly.

"We have had no orders for dismissal," said Steve quietly. Every instinct in him prompted him to remain. No risks could be too great to run in order to get a clear interpretation of the mystery afoot. "Our rowboat, *Excellenz*, I fear, has left us. It pulled away as soon as we came on board."

He paused, waiting. The bluff might go over and again it might not. It seemed an eternity before von Lanzmann spoke, curtly and arrogantly.

"You may stay, *Leutnants*. In fact, you may accompany us on the inspection. My Bats all must be shown the workings of this craft and the projectiles. There are several things in which you can help me. The manipulation of levers and the like. The crew of this ship are all in their quarters ashore at the present moment. Admiral!"

Von Lanzmann rose to his feet, his eyes shining, and the blue-cloaked admiral fol-

lowed his example. The Boche flyer strode to the end of the cabin, flung aside the curtain before the door and stepped through. Silently Steve and Spike crowded after him. There came a short passage and then they were in a great cockpit with seats for two pilots and a mass of instruments on a dashboard.

"The pilots' nest," said von Lanzmann sharply. "On either side in the wings are the machine-gun pits. They dot the craft from end to end. Not only do we carry Maxims but several small cannon. With one of them we smashed down some Allied plane or other that appeared behind us on our homeward journey. It was caught in our rear searchlight and blown to pieces in a second."

INTO Steve's mind flashed the recollection of the beam of light that had blinded him as he reached the river. So it had been this gigantic craft which he had been trailing all the time, without knowing it. All the way from Chaumont he had followed the Boches' latest monster of destruction.

"They think we're done for," he muttered. "All the better. Every minute we stay in here means we're getting so much closer to the Boches' secret."

He kept his face impassive, confident that under helmet and goggles it would be unrecognizable for that of a Yank. Von Lanzmann was going on, bristling with technical details. Admiral Von Klurg nodded his approval at each sentence.

"This way, please," said von Lanzmann. Once more they were going back to the great cabin. "I realize that you are more interested in the offensive power of the ship than in its method of operation. Let me show you where the Scarlet Bats are fastened. Here, you!" he barked commandingly at Waring, gesturing toward an array of machinery that stood next to

the wall, "draw back that central lever—the one with the red handle."

Steve's grip closed on the lever and, exerting all his strength, he pulled at it. Abruptly a gasp broke from him. All along the flooring of the ship trap doors rose and he gazed down through one of them at the water.

"You see," said von Lanzmann, stepping forward and pointing down through the aperture, "the Scarlet Bats are brought over from the *Schloss* and attached to the apparatus which lies beneath the hull. Into each one of the Bats, through a trap door, passes a pilot and settles himself in the projectile.

"You know already the nature of the explosive with which the Hornet is loaded—the newest and most deadly charge in Germany's possession. And then the great ship sweeps on for its target, cuts off its motor at a distance of miles, and looses the thirteen lethal Bats that it carries by a tug on yonder lever with the green-painted handle.

"Out through the skies"—von Lanzmann's hand made a soaring motion—"just as a plane would fly, go the Scarlet Bats, steered from within by the pilots who have volunteered their lives to the *Vaterland*. The small wings and the small electric motors in each projectile allow them to be steered inexorably to their target. The Scarlet Bats are really human torpedoes."

Von Lanzmann nodded curtly to Steve who thrust forward on the lever and the traps closed. The Boche stood with feet wide apart and head erect. His eyes blazed strange and cruel fire.

"There, in brief summary, Admiral von Klurg, is a description of the nature and means of operation of the Scarlet Bats. It has taken me over a year to direct the building of this tremendous mother ship and manufacture the torpedoes. Never did I doubt that a call for volunteers to

give their lives for Germany would go unheeded.

"Already more than sixty men have been transferred to my command. I expended, as you have already heard, the first thirteen in the attack on the transports and others tonight in the raid on Chaumont. But there are more ready to take their places in an instant.

"We are well served by our Intelligence agents behind the enemy's lines and at their various headquarters. The information that was obtained by slaying Captain Trent in London was transferred to me inside of a night, by secret plane from England to Spa, and thence over the new wireless.

"The mother ship went out, located the transports in the Channel from a distance of miles, and then I shot my human torpedoes. They did not miss a ship. The Scarlet Bats can accomplish what hitherto has not been possible.

"They never miss their target when hurled as projectiles through the air. Do you see what that means? The destruction of every important building and munitions depot in Paris or the rest of France; the extermination of London; the destruction of all massed bodies of Allied troops; the locating and extinction of the Allied military leaders—in short, the winning of the war!"

"The winning of the war!" repeated Admiral von Klurg in a deep voice. "Yes, von Lanzmann, that is now assured. And now—"

"I await my next assignment," cut in the Boche flyer. "You sent word from Spa to expect you in connection with it. Ah, *Kapitan* Helm!"

The aide was striding rapidly along the cabin. He arrived in front of von Lanzmann and handed a paper to him.

"The cipher message from Spa, major. Rendered into the clear."

Von Lanzmann's eyes fell to the paper

and he scanned it eagerly. His face flushed with triumph.

"Gott, admiral, what luck! The Bats go out in a few hours on the greatest mission of destruction since the war began. Twelve American transports, containing close to thirty thousand troops, are nearing the French coast. They will never get there! Thirty thousand cursed Yankees to be destroyed at one blow!"

"That is just the word I have been waiting for," rumbled the admiral. His big hand shot out and plucked the sheet away from von Lanzmann. His gray brows drew together fiercely. "So! They are headed for Brest. Well, you shall meet them far out at sea at a point we can select later."

"I can destroy them hundreds of miles out in the Atlantic," exulted von Lanzmann. "Do you realize that this ship we stand in has twice the cruising radius of a Zeppelin? It can travel at a height that renders it utterly invisible from below.

"We know that the Americans have been landing hundreds of thousands of troops in France a month. They are the sole reserves of the Allies. Without them the Allied cause is hopeless. And from now on"—his voice rose to almost a scream and madness glared in his eyes—"not a single Yankee soldier will set foot in France! The Scarlet Bats will send everyone to the bottom of the sea!

"Forget the submarine warfare which you instigated, Admiral von Klurg. The Scarlet Bats, swooping through the air, will achieve what your U-boats have failed to do. In my hands lies victory!"

A SILENCE, pregnant with tension, fell in the cabin. Steve's brain rioted with suppressed emotion. With his own eyes he had seen the terrible attack of the Bats on the transports in the Channel. He realized only too well what they could do. Von Lanzmann had voiced a fright-

ful threat but it was true. Every American transport carrying troops across the Atlantic was doomed.

"Your submarines cruising far out in the Atlantic on the regular traffic lanes can wireless to Spa the approach of any convoys," went on von Lanzmann. "They will be our spies. No longer should they be used for attack but simply as eyes for the Scarlet Bats."

He whirled and bit out a command.

"Kapitan Helm, summon my pilots, the men who have offered their lives. I shall show the admiral here and now a scene of tremendous importance."

The aide saluted and darted to a portable telephone that stood by a cabin window.

"Pilots' barracks," he rasped quickly. "Send all flyers to the ship immediately. Orders of Major von Lanzmann."

An excited bustle commenced on the embankment. Steve stepped quietly to a window and watched a mass of men piling into small craft at the landing. Oars splashed and the boats crossed the water at top speed. Up the swinging ladder poured the flyers and into the cabin.

"Line up in the center of the floor," grated von Lanzmann. "Form two separate ranks." His savage glance fell upon Steve and Spike. "You also, lieutenants. No one is permitted to avoid this test.

IN A moment or so two long rows of flyers stood in the middle of the cabin, facing each other with six feet of space between them. Von Lanzmann stalked the length of the premises to the desk at its end, fumbled in a drawer and came back.

Hard, weather-beaten faces stared at him. Never before had Steve seen such fierce savagery as that which shone on the features of von Lanzmann's volunteers. There were close to fifty of them. Von Lanzmann held a pack of cards.

"Draw one, each of you as I pass down the line," he grated. "You will find out soon enough what the idea is. Remember that every one of you has pledged his life for any mission that I choose for you."

Hand after hand reached out and drew a card as von Lanzmann, his features set like stone, walked between the ranks. Steve's fingers fell on a card when von Lanzmann reached him and he took it.

"Ace of spades," he whispered to Spike who stood next him. "Deal me three more like that and I'll scoop the pot for a million. What did you get?"

"Seven of spades," returned Spike.

Von Lanzmann had reached the end of the line and turned.

"Who drew the spades?" he asked in a hard, commanding voice. "Take one pace to the front."

Steve and Spike moved forward, along with eleven others. They looked expectantly at von Lanzmann. Somehow Steve had an odd feeling of uneasiness. This was no game that von Lanzmann was playing. It was a test of some kind.

"Flyers, I salute you," rasped von Lanzmann. "You are honored above your comrades. Very shortly the mother ship will set out to blow a convoy of Yankee transports into fragments. You are the ones who have been selected to die in the attempt! *Hoch!*"

"*Hoch!*" roared the pilots in a chorus of reckless unison.

"The spades are the cards of death and glory!" crackled von Lanzmann. "It is as fair a way as any to pick the men who are to go to their doom, destroying the ships of the Yankees. Now you know why you have been sent here to me.

"There is much left to be explained to you concerning the Scarlet Bats but that will come in good time. In the meanwhile no one will be permitted to leave this ship. Your necessary flying equipment will be

brought to you here by boat. *Kapitan Helm*, take the door!"

The aide nodded and strode to the entrance. He drew a Luger from his holster and stood, framed in the opening, his face steady and determined.

"I regret that before our first sally a volunteer changed his mind and tried to slip away. His body is at the bottom of the water under this ship. I shot him with my own hand." Von Lanzmann spoke harshly and an undercurrent of menace threaded his accents. "It is best to take all precautions. That is all, gentlemen."

The pilots scattered, moving about the cabin and looking with curiosity at its equipment. Steve drew Spike to one side, well out of earshot of the rest. They stood at a machine-gun nest, set in the wall of the cabin. The snout of the quick-firer jutted venomously out through a slit. Steve's face was serious.

"We're trapped, Spike," he said softly. "We've got to get our brains going and find a way to get home."

His gaze strayed toward the door that opened on the ladder. Helm still stood there, silent and watchful, with his hand on his Luger. Instinctively Steve's own fingers clutched the butt of his Colt.

"I could get him O.K., but it wouldn't do us any good. The boats that brought the flyers over have gone back. There's no way way out of here but swimming and you know how long we'd last at that."

"And if we stay here?" asked Spike.

"We'll each be put in one of those Scarlet Bats and fired at an American transport," returned Steve grimly.

CHAPTER SIX

Bat Trap

WARING stared moodily from a window of the great ship. An hour had passed and still he and Barton remained

helpless, unable to figure a way out of their situation. Steve's face had grown lined with thought. Finally he spoke.

"We can't get out of here alive. But we can try to disable the ship. Tamper with the mechanism somehow so that she'll crash after she gets up in the air. We'll go down with her but what of that?"

"By cripes, you're right!" Barton husked. "Let's get started. Where?"

Steve sent a cautious glance around the cabin. *Kapitan* Helm remained, motionless as a statue, at the door. Von Lanzmann and Admiral von Klurg sat at the table, their heads close together, and a mass of maps and papers before them. Beyond lay the opening to the cockpit.

"The controls," said Steve quietly. "We can make a mess of them in no time. We'd never have a chance at the engines without being caught. Walk softly. We've got to pass von Lanzmann."

With every nerve tense Steve began to go down the cabin, assuming a casual air. He came within three feet of von Lanzmann but the Boche did not look at him.

"*Kapitan* Helm!" he called. "Come here for a moment. Put another guard on the door!"

Steve took three steps more and passed into the corridor leading to the cockpit with Spike close behind him.

"Now for it," he rapped. "Make it snappy." The next moment they were in the cockpit and Steve surveyed it hastily.

"All clear, but I'm having a look up above first to make certain."

He went up a short ladder fastened to the wall, thrust open a panel in the roof of the pit, and came out on the huge top wing. It stretched out bare and tremendous. At each end thick ropes tied to hooks held the great ship in place. They ran to other hooks attached in the ceiling of the cave, midway between ship and shore.

"Moored tight," Steve muttered and

slid down the ladder. Then he was at the controls fingering them. "Look around," he ordered Spike curtly. "Dig me up a wrench or something."

Almost at once Spike found a wrench, a pair of pliers and a bayonet.

"These do?" he asked.

Steve gripped the wrench and put the bayonet between his teeth.

"O. K., Spike. Now I'll ruin these controls pronto. Not totally but enough so they'll go haywire after this crate has taken off." He bent to his work.

"Stand up!" ordered a harsh voice.

Steve whirled, straightening. *Kapitan* Helm stood a few feet away, framed in the door, a Luger leveled at them.

"You swine! What are you doing meddling with the controls? Tampering with the machinery means death on this ship!"

A jet of flame leaped from the muzzle of his pistol as Steve instinctively twitched aside. Lead tore through Waring's loose coverall at the shoulder. His hand went back, came forward, and the heavy wrench whirled through the air.

It struck full in the center of Helm's forehead and the German staggered back, struck the wall of the cabin and slid to the floor in a senseless heap.

"*Kapitan* Helm!" crashed the voice of von Lanzmann. "What has happened?"

"God!" ripped out Steve. "We'll have a squadron of Boches on us in a few seconds! We can't stand up against them. This way, Spike. To the upper wing!"

He hurled himself at the wall ladder and went up it at top speed. Out through the open panel he scrambled and gave a hand to Spike, hauling him up beside him. With a swift shove he sent the panel back into place. Below them he heard the din of footsteps and von Lanzmann's savage voice.

"Someone has knocked Helm unconscious or killed him! Those two new fly-

ers passed me not fifteen minutes ago. Find them!"

Desperately Steve looked along the wing of the huge ship. They were marooned on it without cover. Mechanically he began to walk along it, crouching low. The panel flew open behind him and a head shot out into the clear.

"There they are!" roared the Boche.

A pistol jutted out of the flyer's hand. Barton flung up his gun and fired, its bullet chipping the wing within six inches of the German.

"Take one yourself," he shouted. With a yell, the Boche vanished and once more von Lanzmann's tones rang out.

"They shot at you, at one of my flyers? That means they must be traitors! What are you saying? One of them shouted at you in English? *Gott*, they are spies! Kill them like dogs!"

"So that's that," said Steve grimly. "I guess this is where we make our last stand. But we'll have a few minutes. They won't come up that ladder again in a hurry."

SHOUTS and excited cries rang out below and then followed an ominous silence. Steve knelt on the wing, keeping his automatic poised while his gaze roved here and there. The huge ship rocked a little on the water, straining at the moorings. Then with violent suddenness, the crash of machine-gun fire ripped out and a hail of bullets swept over Waring's head. From a rounded hump of the great craft's fuselage spat jets of flame.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "They've turned a Maxim nest on us! Down, Spike, down!" Frantically they flung themselves on to the wing. Steve rolled over, gasping and staring. Another burst sent a cyclone of slugs past them. Then abruptly the volley ceased and muffled cursing rose.

"The gun's jammed!" shouted Steve.

"Quick, Spike, I've got a hunch! It's our only chance."

Into his brain inspiration had flashed. He tore along the wing and took hold of a mooring rope with one hand, clutching the bayonet he still carried with the other.

"Look, Spike!" he gasped. He sawed away with the blade and the rope parted. "Cut through your rope with this bayonet, grab it hard, stand back and swing out with a shove. These ropes are fastened to the ceiling half way out. The pendulum swing ought to take us clear to the shore. It's just like trapeze stuff. If it doesn't work—well, we land in hell!" The venomous rattle of the machine gun erupted and its bullets swished close. "Jump!" yelled Steve.

He had a glimpse of Spike frantically slashing at the second rope as he drew back on his heels, seized the mooring cable as high up as he could reach and thrust forward with his feet.

Then he was sailing out into space, whirling around and around, from the vast height of the wing. The water rushed by him far below as his body swung through empty air. The embankment loomed up and the rope for a dizzying instant stopped above it. In that instant Steve loosed his hold and dropped. Hard stone met his feet.

"I was right after all," he exulted. "The devil of a long swing, but I made it."

More shots slammed and the wall of the cave behind him became dotted with splashes of lead. The machine gun on the fuselage of the ship was swivelling and lancing its fire at him. Through the air came the figure of Spike, high up on the rushing rope. Barton poised above his head and dropped, landing beside him.

"Gun out and make for the door we came in by!" shouted Steve. "We're on the other side of the ship from the crowd

of shore Boches. They don't know what's up yet."

With the savage tumult of the machine gun ringing in their ears, they darted along the embankment, turned a curve and raced for the entrance door. It was a full fifty yards away now and around it clustered a number of Boches.

"We'll make it," panted Steve.

He flung a glance over his shoulder at the ship riding on the water. The fire from the machine gun had stopped. They were out of the range of vision of the gunners. A single figure sprang suddenly into view on the top wing. It was von Lanzmann and his voice rang like a trumpet across the water.

"Stop those men! Shoot them down! They are Yankee spies!"

"Faster!" grated Steve. His gun was out. "Charge that gang at the door! Shoot our way through!"

At top speed they pounded down on the crowd of Boches, faces set and eyes glinting. Hands swept to belts and a scattering of shots blasted. Almost in Steve's face a pistol exploded. Then his own automatic roared.

Half a dozen figures toppled to the stone floor and the rest leaped away from the rush of Yank lead with panic in their faces. A single Boche blocked Steve's path and the barrel of his Colt crashed down. He was through, racing for the hoist while hoarse shouts dinned after him.

"Maybe the lift isn't there," he thought and panic mounted in him. Then a gasp of relief broke from his lips as he saw the platform. "Get aboard," he rapped to Spike, leaping onto the hoist and gripping the starting lever. "Here we go!" Upward rose the platform, creaking.

"What's next?" asked Spike.

"There are two guards up here with a machine gun," said Steve grimly. "We're going to rush them and take them

off their feet the minute we hit the landing. We've only got about five shots left between us. We need that gun." Above a blur of light appeared and the hoist rose slowly toward it. Then Waring jerked the lever and it stopped.

"Now for it! *Allez!*" he snarled and plunged out onto the landing.

THE glare of sunlight struck full into his eyes, almost blinding him. He had not realized until this moment that day had long since dawned. Only a few yards away the pair of Boches sat at the machine gun looking out over the river. Their heads turned as they heard the rush of feet. Beneath the hod helmets their features paled and their eyes bulged as they stared into the muzzles of the Colts.

"Drop your guns and stand up!" rasped Steve. "Quick, if you want to live!"

Two Lugers hit the stone and the guards rose, holding their hands high in the air.

"March to the elevator!" ordered Steve and the Boches stumbled toward it and onto the platform. "Go down to the bottom and stay there. If anyone comes up that hoist I'll turn the machine gun on them."

Gaping and shuddering, one of the Germans pulled the lever and the lift vanished from sight.

"For a few minutes that'll hold 'em," muttered Steve. "In that few minutes we'll be well away from here."

"Where to?" demanded Spike.

"Over the river," replied Steve. "The cable car is still here." He pointed to the carrier, still hanging on the wire strand. "Hop into the rear, Spike, while I grab the m. g."

Moving swiftly across the landing, Steve scooped up the light Maxim and its belts of ammunition. Then he tumbled into the front seat of the car, rest-

ing the weapon beside him and reached for the throttle.

"This is no airplane," he called back. "But it'll take us across hell-bent for leather. I'm going to pull this thing wide out. Hang on!"

He opened the throttle and, jerking forward, the cable car started out over dizzy space. In the clear sunlight the scene stood out in vivid panorama. Beetling cliffs overhung the river which flowed in blue expanse hundreds of feet below.

The ruined *Schloss*, perched on its crag, looked like a stubby finger pointing into the sky. Figures moved slowly about the huge landing stage in the center of the stream. Every detail of the picture was etched on Steve's mind as the car colled rapidly along, lurching from side to side. There was no definite plan in his mind, only chaotic hope.

"Perhaps we can bluff our way through the *Schloss* and out into the woods behind it," he told himself. "That is, if the alarm doesn't get through first."

He flung a glance behind him. The canvas wall that hid the entrance to the nest of the Hornets had parted, and a rowboat, tiny from that height, was moving through it. A man stood in the bow.

"Cripes!" shouted Spike. "He's got a signal flag in each hand. He's wig-wagging to the float in the middle of the river!"

Erect in the front of the boat Steve saw a figure, brandishing colored squares. The flags moved in swift precision and stopped. Instantly a figure on the float signaled back and a terrific bustle broke out as he stopped and ran for a group of men. They scattered and three of them raced for a plane.

Steve leaned forward and opened the throttle of the cable car full. It jolted, picked up speed and rushed along for the *Schloss*. Its walls came closer and closer and already he could make out the fig-

ures of the two guards bent over their machine gun.

"We'll do for them the way we fixed the other pair," he told himself. "That is, if we can get to them in time."

Instinctively he was shutting off the power. Quick stabs of flame broke out on the landing and smoky tracer whipped past the swaying car.

"Good God! They've got us cold," he snarled. "They've been warned about us."

Once more lead sprayed across the gulf but it went wide. The range was still too great to allow any accuracy. The carrier had stopped and swung high above the river, motionless.

"We're in hell's own jam, alright," Waring called back to Spike. "If we go on those blasted Boches will knock us cold. We can't dodge in this car. We'll be just a couple of sitting shots for them."

"Look below," answered Spike. "You'll see some worse news. A crate has taken off from the landing float and two more are on the way."

The roar of an airplane engine dipped over the water. Zooming upward, the swift shape of a scout ship showed, the sunlight glistening on its black-crossed wings. In a roaring bank it came around, pointed its nose for the carrier car, and tore for it.

Steve shuddered and rested the barrel of his light m. g. on the rim of the car. His lips drew back from his teeth. At terrific velocity the Fokker rushed at him while his finger tightened on the trigger.

"Come on!" he grated. "I'll swap lead with you!"

UPWARD streaked the Boche crate and he saw the pilot crouched back of his quick-firers. Flame darted from them in twin streams and in that instant Steve slammed his own blast at the hurtling enemy.

It seemed incredible that he could live

amid the cyclone of bullets that whipped past him. Then in a wild twist the Fokker sheered away and for an instant its fire fell off. Waring whirled and flung a last volley into the cockpit.

The pilot threw up his hands and collapsed in his seat. Spinning helplessly, the doomed ship started its fall. The thunder of more motors crashed out and everywhere Steve looked the air was full of wings. Four Fokkers at least had streaked upward from the float.

"Can't stay here, hanging in mid-air," he muttered hopelessly. "It's the *Schloss* or out! Get set," he rapped to Spike. The muzzle of his m. g. now protruded over the front of the cable car. "I'm going to storm the landing."

His hand flashed to the throttle and opened it full. In a jerk the carrier went forward, swept into speed and went swaying straight for the *Schloss*. Steve huddled down in his seat, only his head and shoulders showing above the rim of the car. His grip closed on the m. g. trigger. On the *Schloss* landing the Boche gunners bent again to their piece and its leaden fury lanced across the air.

Still the car swept on, plunging into the hail of slugs. Out from the bore of Steve's weapon blasted his volleys. He kept the sight on the German Maxim that every second rushed closer. From behind him he heard a startled yell above the clatter of the guns. "They're on our tail, Steve!"

Tracer poured down from the sky at an angle, coming from the rear. In desperation Waring lifted his m. g. a fraction and hurled its burst at close range. The car, rushing along, was on top of the Boche piece and he could almost feel the cruel lead tearing into him. Then a shout broke from his lips.

"Got 'em, by Cripes!"

The two German gunners collapsed over their quick-firer, struck full by his last

volley. Metal slashed the sides of the cable car as Steve flung it forward for the last few yards and cut the power. It struck the buffer on the landing and stopped.

Steve leaped out while bullets plowed the stone about him. Three Fokkers with roaring engines were banking almost off the face of the cliff.

"They chased us up to the last second!" he exulted. "But they didn't get us! Spike, grab that machine gun!"

He ran for the edge of the cliff, carrying the weapon from the cable car. Here and there big stones were scattered and he bent down to raise them into a rough barricade. A quick glance to the rear showed him a single means of entrance to the *Schloss*, a heavy door across which spread a bar.

"They can't get at us from behind," he muttered. "That's something. They've got to attack us from the front by planes."

Even as he spoke the Fokkers up above tilted their noses and dove for the landing. One after the other in a line they charged and flame jetted from the Span-da-us of the nearest. Steve could feel the wind of the bullets as they rushed past his head. He flung up his gun and poured slugs in fierce blasts. The first Fokker wheeled and swept out over the river. The second and the third came on, firing.

"Slam 'em!" shouted Spike, frenziedly working his weapon. "Get 'em when they turn!"

The second Boche ship banked and as its undercarriage came into view the blasts of the two Yank m. g.'s took it squarely. Bits of cloth blew away and eddied downward toward the river like leaves. The last Fokker hurled a burst and darted away, zooming.

"More coming up," said Spike quietly. "They're all jumping into the air off the float."

Steve wiped the sweat from his forehead and surveyed the river below. Off the landing stage darted a pair of fast scout ships. Mechanics were busy over other crates. From the skies a flaming torch was hurtling, the Fokker Steve and Spike had poured their bullets into.

Spinning over and over, and blazing from prop to rudder, it dropped through space. In a roar of fire it struck the landing float and its burning pieces scattered like rain. Steve gripped Barton by the arm.

"There goes the landing stage!" he shouted. "It's blazing in a dozen places!"

Smoke rolled up, obscuring the view. From behind the Yanks came a dull, violent pounding and Steve turned his head. The Boches in the *Schloss* were hammering at the door that gave onto the landing. A smile edged Waring's lips.

"That bar will hold them for quite a while. And when it does give, a couple of good bursts into the open door will attend to the Boches. Get ready, Spike, the Fokkers are coming back at us."

Roaring, the black-crossed ships plunged for the Yanks and pounded their slugs in a maelstrom of hate. Steve's gun jumped and raved and he saw a strut go on the nearest Fokker. Then the Boches were banking almost on top of the barricade.

The injured crate slipped suddenly to the side and crashed full into the next Fokker. Inextricably locked, the pair of ships whirled drunkenly toward the water far below. They plummeted through space and struck the surface of the river, sinking out of sight.

"Whoopee!" yelled Spike. "You can't say we aren't doing any damage to the damned Boches!"

Smoke rolled in flame-shot clouds along the doomed landing float and men were leaping off it into the river. Steve stared

with narrowed eyes at the scene of destruction in front of him.

The Fokkers had drawn off and were hovering uncertainly in the heights. It would be madness for them to attack again against the merciless accuracy of the Yanks' gunfire.

"Yes," grated Steve. "We're sitting pretty. It'll be a long, long time before they can get up here to us, if at all. What's that?"

He turned and stared upward and backward, a strange and heavy swishing in his ears. From the top of the tower above him, spread wide, something like a dark cloud was falling. Its shadow almost covered the landing. Panic struck him as he realized what it was.

"Jump, Spike!" he shouted. "They've dropped the hoisting net on us! Beat it!"

He grabbed his gun and rose, but it was too late. The rope folds of the big net smashed down and engulfed him, leaving him writhing helplessly in its meshes. He could not lift his gun to shoot.

"God!" panted Steve as a heavy battering came from behind him and the door to the *Schloss* heaved on its hinges. "They have us cold!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Scarlet Patrol

THE cable car rolled rapidly along beneath its steel rope and the cliff landing on the opposite side of the river grew closer each instant. Steve tugged once more at the cords that bound his wrists in front of him and then relaxed.

There never had been a chance for Spike and himself to clear themselves of the net that had fallen on them. When the *Schloss* door gave way under the Boches' battering they had been taken without firing a shot.

Spike had been whirled across the river

on the carrier and now it had come back for him. The car swayed on, passed through the final stretch and came to rest on the landing.

"Get out," snarled a German voice.

A Luger jammed into Steve's back. Rough hands ripped him from his seat and stood him upright. He found himself staring into the demoniac face of von Lanzmann. Ruthless fire glowed in the eyes of the Boche leader and foam covered his lips. The next instant von Lanzmann's fist struck him in the face and he staggered back.

"You Yankee swine!" shrieked the German. "So you have penetrated our secret, have you? Curse you, you have destroyed my float and killed I do not know how many of my men! Who are you?"

"You'll have to find that out for yourself," grated Steve. A terrible fury against the brutal Boche gripped him. But he kept cool, realizing his helplessness. "You'll get no information from us either."

A short distance away Spike Barton stood under guard, a purpling bruise on his cheek. Armed Boches crowded the landing and everywhere Steve looked he met the snarls of hostile faces.

"Do you think you two will live to see another day?" shouted von Lanzmann hoarsely. His twitching fingers fell to the Luger at his belt, closing on its grip.

"No, shooting is too easy a death for you! There is a better way!" He turned on his heel and stalked for the hoist. "Bring those men after me," he added.

Steve felt the muzzles of pistols jammed viciously into his back. He and Spike were being hustled to the mouth of the lift. Already the hoist had gone down with von Lanzmann on it and it was minutes before it came up again.

"On board, Yankees!" rapped an order and Steve was thrust roughly onto the platform. It was going down through

the gloom while Steve's spirits sank **also**.

Their doom had been pronounced by von Lanzmann. The Boche would show no mercy to them. The hoist struck bottom and once more he and Spike were going out through the smaller anteroom to the embankment. Von Lanzmann was stepping into a small boat and a larger craft bobbed against the stone wall.

"They're taking us out to the ship," muttered Steve to Spike. "That must mean—"

"Silence!" snarled the guard next to him. "One word out of you and I shoot."

Steven went mute, marching mechanically along between his captors. A glint of amazement came into his eyes as they roved over the great ship, rocking on the water. Boats of all kinds were hovering about it and on the wings and fuselage men moved. A small army of Boches was busy about its length.

Sunlight swept into the cavern in a flood as the vast canvass wall on the river side drew apart and a motor barge chugged in. On it loomed a mass of shining shapes. The projectiles! it came to Steve with a shock. A new supply of Bats for the ship! Cripes, that meant it was going out almost at once!

His thoughts became a blur. Faster and faster he was hustled along the embankment until he was shoved down into the big rowboat. The craft went swiftly over the water while he crouched helplessly in its center. He and Spike were ringed around by threatening pistols. The boat reached the ladder leading up to the cabin door of the vast ship.

"Up you go," ordered his guards.

In a moment more he stood on the floor of the cabin. All about him was a scene of tremendous activity. The flyers who had drawn the cards of death were now clad in full fighting kit. They stood beside the open trap doors. Von

Lanzmann and Admiral von Klurg were surveying them with steely eyes.

"You have your orders," barked von Lanzmann. "You know what you are about to do. In a very few minutes more the Bats will be attached to this ship and you will enter them. *Hoch!*"

"*Hoch!*" rang the answering cry from the doomed men. Their hands flew to their helmets in salute as they stiffened.

"You will fall through the air upon the Yankee transports. And you two *verdamm!* Yankees"—his savage eyes shot fire at Steve and Spike—"will fall through the air with them. There is a bomb trap in the floor of the supply cabin. You will be placed on that and dropped through space at that same time that the Bats are launched.

"It is a far more terrible death than standing you against a wall and shooting you. Think that over while you are dropping twenty thousand feet into the Atlantic Ocean. Is that not a true vengeance, Admiral von Klurg?"

"There is no such thing as mercy in war," the admiral rumbled. "These men are spies. Do with them what you wish as long as they are disposed of. You are all ready to start, Major von Lanzmann?"

"We take off as soon as the projectiles have been fastened, admiral," said von Lanzmann. "We know where to find the American transports at sea. We run no risk in crossing France by daylight. This ship can travel at such a height that it is utterly invisible from below, as I have told you. Pilots, prepare to descend into the Bats!"

"Guard!" rasped von Lanzmann. "Remove the Yankees to the supply room. Lock them in and stand sentry over them. Look in on them every half hour. Be off!"

Again hands gripped Steve and rushed him over the floor. He was dragged the

whole length of the main cabin and thrust through a doorway in the stern.

He had a last glimpse of von Lanzmann's flyers. They were disappearing through the traps, holding onto the rims and lowering themselves carefully into the waiting bodies of the projectiles. Then the door slammed with a thud and he turned around to stare ruefully at Spike. A small slide opened in the door and the guard's face glared through it.

"I can watch you any time I care to," he snarled. "Also I can shoot."

"Well, we're here," Spike said with a wry grin. "Going on a one-way trip with the Boche air monster."

For the moment Steve did not answer. He was too busy pacing the room and studying their prison. Light streamed through the heavy glass of windows on each side. On shelves from floor to roof were stacked a variety of equipment—parachutes, officers' clothing, blankets, boots. Steve stopped and came back to Spike.

"Nothing here with an edge on it that might help us to cut these ropes," he said. "We'll have to try and get them off with our fingers but I'm afraid there's not much chance. Hold out your wrists."

CLUMSILY his fingers picked and tore at the tightly-bound knots. His nails broke and pain racked him but he kept on grimly. The great ship began to move beneath his feet.

"We're starting!" Spike gasped.

"We're in the air," he said hopelessly. His fingers fell away from their vain task. "I can't get these ropes loose, Spike. And you can't do anything with mine."

The floor of the supply cabin tilted up and Spike's face grew taut.

"On our way is right," he gasped. "And at the rate we're traveling we'll be over the lines in no time. This crate is going hell-bent for leather. I never dreamed any ship could have such speed."

Steve moved cautiously to the window and stared out. Already the earth was a mere blur of green-brown, thousands of feet below.

Suddenly he heard a noise behind him and he turned to see the guard framed in the doorway, a Luger in one hand.

"So?" the guard grated malignantly. "You are admiring the view, Yankee? You have a nice day for your last one." Instinctively Steve moved forward and the pistol came up. "Stand back, swine!" rasped the sentry. "Put your hands up so I can see the ropes. No, you will not get out of those."

Over the shoulder of the sentry appeared the savage face of von Lanzmann. The Boche leader thrust the guard aside and stood glaring at the Yanks.

"I have a bit of news for you swine," he grated. "I do not intend to wait until we reach the sea before dropping you out. In fifteen minutes I am going to send you through the trap. By that time we shall have crossed the Front."

The door slammed shut and Steve and Spike stared at each other horror-stricken.

"Fifteen minutes," said Steve hoarsely. "God, isn't there something we can do?"

His gaze strayed desperately over the cabin and then a quick exclamation broke from him. He jumped forward, dragging a spurred officer's boot from its shelf and holding it between his fettered hands.

"What's that for?" asked Spike.

"I'll show you," rasped Steve. He rushed to the window, raising the boot.

Against the thick glass he crashed the steel-shod footgear. The spur drove a long crack in the pane. Again and again Steve slammed the boot home while the din of the ship's motors drowned the sound of his blows.

Frantically he worked and bit by bit the heavy glass began to crack up. Then

a long sliver tinkled to the floor and Steve dropped the boot and snatched it up. Around its wider end he wrapped his flying helmet. His eyes glittered with excitement.

"It's as sharp as a knife, Spike," he panted. "Hold out your wrists."

The glass sawed deeply into the ropes that bound Barton and they parted. Spike snatched the leather-wound sliver from Steve and a moment later Waring's fetters lay on the floor.

"Give me that blade," rapped Steve.

He struck the door blow after blow and then crouched to the side of it, his improvised weapon ready.

"Yell, Spike," he urged. "Yell like hell and get that Boche in here."

The cabin rang with Barton's shouts and instantly the door flew open.

"Stop that *verdammt* noise!" snarled the guard. "You cursed—"

The words died in his throat and he pitched forward the glass blade driven deep into his chest with all Steve's power behind the blow. In a flash Waring snatched the Luger from the wounded man's hand.

"Let's go!" he rasped.

"Where?" bit out Spike.

"Straight for the cockpit. Wait a minute." He jumped for the shelves. "Get a parachute on you!"

STEVE hurled himself through the door and rushed up the cabin. It was filled with men, standing at their posts by the machine guns and at various instruments. There was no sign of the suicide flyers. They were in the Bats, below the belly of the ship.

With narrowed eyes and pounding heart Steve tore along. A last leap brought him to the ranks of levers and his free hand closed on the green-striped one. "Here's where the Scarlet Bats get theirs!" he snarled and yanked.

The lever clicked and the whole floor of the cabin rose. The giant ship had jumped scores of feet into the air, released of the weight of the projectiles. Shouts of alarm filled the cabin as the Boches turned around. Men were flung from their feet. Steve whirled and plunged forward, his gun spitting flame.

"The Yankees!" screamed von Lanzmann. He and Admiral von Klurg sat at the desk, paralyzed with astonishment. "The madmen are loose! Shoot them!"

Pistols cracked and a hail of lead spattered the cabin. Steve flung up his gun and let drive at von Lanzmann who flung himself under the desk. Then Waring was in the corridor leading to the control pit and speeding along it.

He burst out into the nest. There were three men in it and their startled faces went white. Hands reached for guns. Steve's Luger barked twice and two of the Boches went down. He smashed with the barrel at the head of the German who sat at the controls and the pilot collapsed against the cushions.

"Get a gun off the floor!" snarled Steve to Spike. "Hold the door!"

He leaned forward and wrenched the body of the senseless pilot out of its seat. Sliding in behind the controls, he gripped the joystick. A fierce, reckless exultation flooded through him as he drew back on the stick and felt the nose of the mammoth ship come up. Behind him a volley of shots racketed from Spike. With a pistol in each hand he was hurling bursts of lead down the corridor. Screams and oaths answered the shots.

"Spike!" shouted Steve. "Watch out! I'm going to put this ship on its back."

Roaring, the giant plane went upward. Steve flung on full speed and heard a chaos of startled cries ringing from the main cabin. Back there the Boches were tumbling and falling all over the place.

The propeller pointed straight into the sky and slowly, inexorably, the ship began to loop. Then it was clear over on its back, thundering through the arch. Steve let himself go and dropped landing with a thud beside Barton.

"Quick!" he gasped. "Get the panel open!" He bent down and wrenched at the slide in the roof of the cabin which was now the floor. It came open and he poised on its edge, staring down at a mass of fleecy clouds that lay below.

"Jump, Spike," he said quietly. "It's our only chance."

The next instant he was falling, plunging through space. His hand gripped the release ring of the parachute and ripped. Above him Spike dropped through the opening and came hurtling down. With a jerk the chute opened and Steve had a last glimpse of the great ship, reeling pilotless through the heights on its back before the cloud bank closed about him and its mist blanketed his vision. For an eternity, it seemed, he fell blindly and then he was out in the sunlight.

"The Front," he muttered. "We're landing way behind it. And, good God, here comes the plane!"

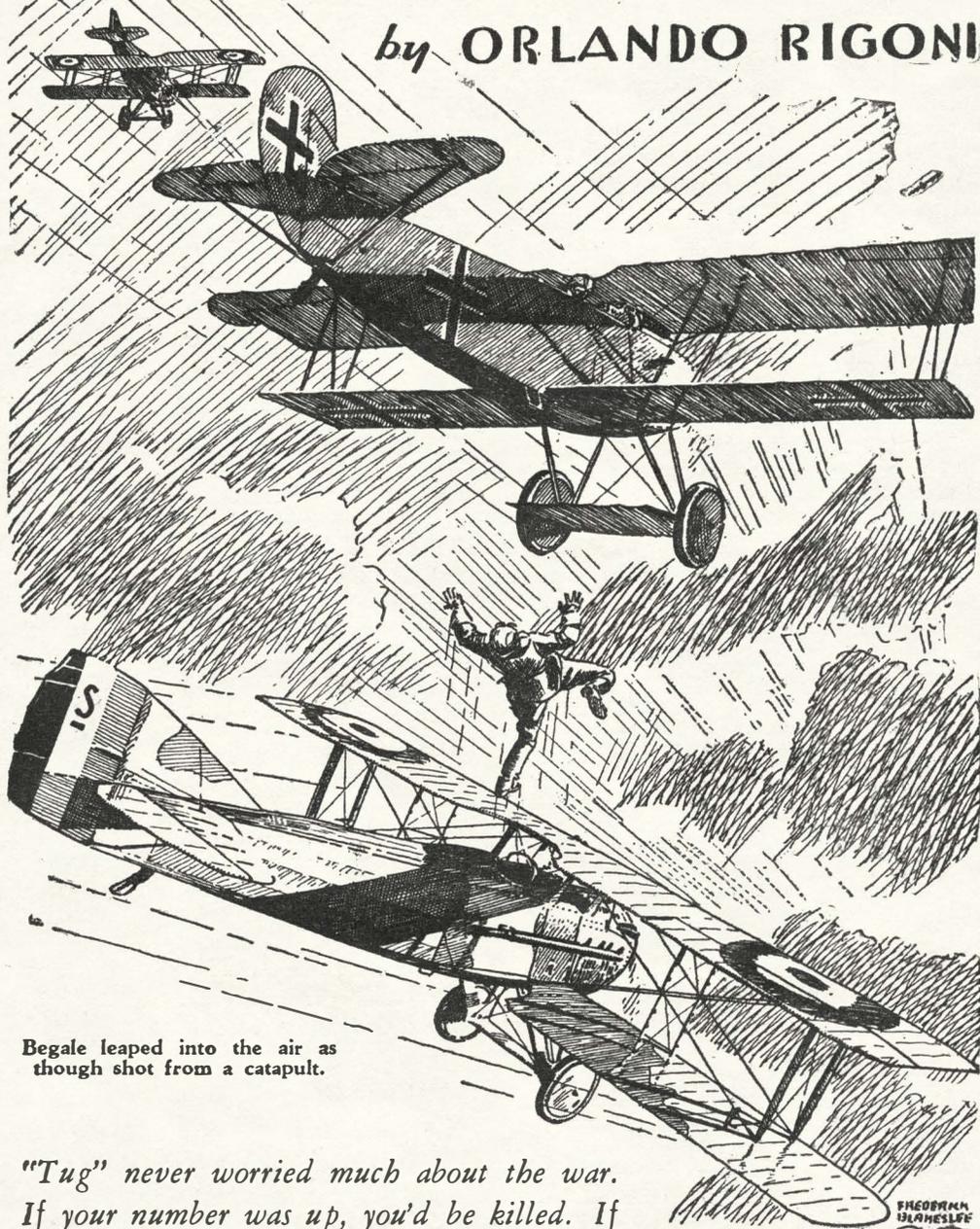
Lurching out of the cloud bank two hundred yards away, the giant ship hurtled helplessly downward toward the earth thousands of feet below. It turned over and over and the vast wings began to crack. Steve closed his eyes. All too vividly he could picture the scene inside the doomed plane with von Lanzmann, von Klurg and the entire crew being thrown here and there while they rushed to destruction.

"The Scarlet Bats are *fini*," grated Steve.

He opened his eyes and waved cheerfully to Spike who was floating down behind him. Then he gave a sigh of relief and looked beneath, watching the earth drift slowly up to meet them.

The Headless Ace

by ORLANDO RIGONI



Begale leaped into the air as though shot from a catapult.

"Tug" never worried much about the war. If your number was up, you'd be killed. If it wasn't, you'd pull through. But when he met the red Fokker, saw it behead Yanks in mid-air, he vowed that mystery headsman would pay, number or no number—even though he had to catch him with suicide bait!

“TUG” Tidwell crawled stiffly from the wreckage of his Spad 13. Like some prehistoric man, like some chance visitor from an astral world, he drew his long body up straight. Slouchy that body looked in the swaddling folds of the furlined suit—slouchy, but alert.

Tug rubbed a huge, hairy hand across his square, prominent chin. He took one look at the wercked plane. The propeller that had caused his hasty exit from the dogfight was nothing but splintered stumps clinging to the hub of the Hisso.

The center-section struts were cracked and splintered. The vented cowling was mashed and twisted. The long exhaust pipe running back along the fuselage was bent back upon itself and almost tied into a knot.

Tug brushed the goggles off the deep pools of black light that were his eyes. A low rumble issued from his thick chest.

“Junk!” he said with finality.

A smirk moved his grim mouth. It wasn't a smile, nor was it a frown—just an expressive movement of the lips. He knew just where he stood, Tug did. He wasn't complaining. This was war. You were here today, and there tomorrow. If your number was up, all hell couldn't keep you from getting killed. If your number wasn't up, well, you could make a landing with a flayed strut and square foot of wing skin.

He shrugged his thick shoulders. Turning abruptly, he reached a hand in the slot behind the crash pad of the Spad. A gleam of satisfaction came to his deep eyes. The bottle of cognac hadn't busted. He drew it out with a caressing movement.

For one measured minute he studied the bottle. It was his passport to forgetfulness, that bottle. It took more than flesh and blood and bone to make a fighting man. It took spirit. And here it was,

sloshing around within the brown glass of a bottle.

Tug yanked the cork with his even teeth. He shoved a hand across his long nose. Then he lifted the bottle. But he didn't drink. Not one drop of the liquor dribbled down his thick throat. For just at that instant, the air was filled with the whine and whirr of a swiftly falling object.

Tug cocked an eye up. He saw it like a black shadow against the warm gold of the morning sun. As though he were a puppet, drawn by strings, he jerked stiff. Instinctively he knew what that thing was that was falling. Then it crashed!

At the sound of the impact, nausea gripped him. Flesh against earth! Bone driving through twitching muscle! Blood spurting through shattered skin! And hard upon that first object came another, smaller one.

For a long moment Tug stood without moving. His eyes stared glassily before him, as though he were alone with nothing in the world but that broken thing that had been a man. The thunder of the guns at Nancy, to the east of him, was dull background to his thoughts.

He had never before witnessed a body fall out of the sky like this. He had seen many of them leave burning planes, or crippled planes, way up in the sky, but he had never been on the ground to hear them strike. There was something about it that gripped you, that made you feel the batter of bone and flesh.

This body was headless. The head had been severed before the body had left the sky. The head was that second, smaller object, and now it lay close beside the body with the face pressed into the soft ground.

With almost a snarl, Tug lifted the bottle. He pressed it hard against his full lips. Without even a gurgle, he drained it. With a swift movement of

his big hand, he sent the bottle crashing against the wrecked undercarriage of his Spad.

For one minute more he stood still, while the hot liquor raced through his blood. Then squaring his shoulders, he moved forward. With a swift movement he rolled that detached head over. He drew back, gritting his teeth against the sight of that face.

"Ralph McQuade!"

What trick was this? How did the Jerries take a man from a plane while in the air, cut off his head, and throw the body and head down against the earth? There was only one explanation. Ralph had been captured. He had been beheaded, carried back into the air and dumped out.

But even as he contrived the thought, Tug knew it was impossible, for Ralph had been in the same dogfight that he had just left himself. No time for the Boches to do more than just shoot Ralph from the sky. But Ralph's head hadn't been shot off. The thing had been done with a clean cut.

Tug covered the body with leaves and grass. It looked indecent lying there exposed that way. Grimly he legged toward the road that crossed the Meuse on a narrow bridge. He stopped the first transport and got a ride back to Frouard.

MAJOR CANTRELL was pacing the apron in front of the crateshackle when Tug legged up. At the sight of his ace flight leader walking home, the major glared hotly.

"What happened to you, captain? You look a little pale around the gills. Been seeing ghosts?"

Tug tossed his helmet to a rickety bench. He shook his shaggy head.

"I seen a dead man."

The major grunted.

"Plenty of them things around here. Too damn many of them."

Tug's dark eyes squinted. His words came drawn out slow.

"Have you ever stood near a body what's dropped out of the sky? Have you ever heard the strike of flesh and bone against the hard earth?"

The major's head turned on his scrawny neck.

"Can't say that I have ever heard such a thing."

"Well I heard it this morning. I was forced down with a splintered prop. Crashed bad trying to land at sixty miles per in a two-by-four field. Just after I'd pulled myself out of the pieces, the thing came down, right close to me. You don't hear such a thing with your ears, major. You hear it with your eyes! The sound of it goes right through your whole body!"

The major leaned forward.

"Who was it?"

"There wasn't any head on that body, major. The head came down afterwards. It had been cut off in the air before the man fell."

"You must be crazy," Major Cantrell growled. "The Boches ain't fighting with mowing machines."

"I tell you the head was cut off," Tug repeatedly hotly.

"Who was it, captain?" the major asked again.

"Ralph McQuade!"

"Hell you say?"

Tug nodded grimly.

"Better send somebody for the pieces. Where is the flight? Haven't they come down yet?"

"That's why I'm out here," the major told him. "They should have been back before this."

At that very instant, the dull drone of massed Hissos floated across the air. Six spots showed against the sky.

"Three down," Tug growled, "and me one of 'em."

The six ships came down with dead sticks and taxied to the line with a flush of thunder. Out of those ships, climbed six grim-faced young war birds.

"Beagle" Belden was the first in, with his bony face a little gray. He walked directly up to Tug and the major.

"Thought you all got washed out," the major said shortly.

Beagle snorted.

"We been ridin' a nightmare, that's what."

"What d'ya mean?"

"Well, right after Captain Tidwell was splintered out of the fight, a red Fokker D-7 come out of the sun like a streak of light. They wasn't nothing I ever seen what could match the speed of that ship. That Jerry has got something we ain't. Well, he angles around twice, an' then comes in quick, low across McQuade's pit. It was hell, what happened," the man said, biting his lip.

"Go on, finish," the major ordered. Tug was watching the man with fascination.

"That Fokker cut down across about ten feet above McQuade's head. Then we saw McQuade leap from his pit. Just like if he was shot out with a gun. He went flailing clear of his crate, an' then his head fell off. Honest t' God, it did. It fell right off, an' the body an' head went spinning for the ground!"

"What did you men do then?" the major asked in a breathy voice. "Wasn't there one of you could get in a round at the Boche?"

Beagle's lips moved grimly.

"I tell you that crate was fast as light. Where ya think we been? It was just like if that guy was some damned big hawk, with talons ten feet long. That's the way it looked when McQuade made that jump. Well, us guys ganged on the

Jerry. He headed back to *Deutschland* an' we headed with him. But it weren't no use. We hadn't no more chance of catching him than if we was hobbled snails chasing a swallow."

A tense silence followed the speech. The men were huddled in a close group, concern written on their faces. The major faced Captain Tidwell.

"So what?" he said succinctly.

"So hell!" Tug snarled, his big hands clenched slowly, his eyes looking beyond the group of men. "They haven't got a Boche in Germany that can't be outsmarted. I'll take care of that baby. If I don't, you guys can have my pants!"

IT WAS very early, and very gray when the dawn patrol straggled to the line the next morning. The river mist from the Meuse clung close to the ground. Tug Tidwell was the first at the line. Despite the protestations of the mechanic, he adjusted the carburetor just a little lean. He pushed the spark up to the danger point.

The captain knew his planes. Of course a D-7 might beat a Spad 13. But just a little. No Fokker could do over one hundred and forty. Tug groomed the Spad to make up for the couple of miles difference in speed. If he could catch the Fokker, he'd take his chances with it.

The rest of the men fiddled a little nervously with their flying gear. Even the major was on hand to give them a send-off. Tug walked stiffly back to his pit. Reaching into the big pocket of his coveralls, he drew out a bottle. With a jerk of his head, he pulled the cork.

The major sidled over. His pale eyes drew close and his small head shook on his thin neck.

"That stuff won't help you this mornin', captain. You need a steady hand, a clear eye."

Tug stopped in the act of raising the

bottle. His eyes held true upon the major's face. Pounding his arched chest with his huge hand, he replied, "This is me, and this is my fighting spirit," indicating the bottle. "We both need each other." Deliberately he tipped the bottle up. Deliberately he smacked his lips over the burn of the liquor.

The major took no offense. Tug was a queer man, but he did his fighting well.

Tug legged into the pit. He jabbed the throttle of the grumbling Hisso. His eyes blinked as raw flame shot from the stacks. It was as though the roar of the engine drove the fire of the liquor through his veins. He could feel the blood tingle through his pulses.

Throttling down, he looked along the line. All eyes were watching him. He raised his hand. Chocks out! The blatant roar of mighty engines roared out. The Spads were away, kicking up thin lines of dust that mingled with the ground haze.

Fitted close in his little cockpit, Tug swung the flight toward Nancy. Below his trucks swam gutted earth—earth that was clothed in river mist as though to hide its wounds. Yet through breaks in that mist, he could see the ground, it lay there, like gray, putrid matter, as though it was too weary to bleed longer; as though it were incapable of deploring those wounds that men had gouged into it. Like sores, those pockmarks were eaten into the ground, and in those sores men lived, like germs living in the flesh of live things.

A certain elation swayed Tug. Here in the air, it was different. It was clean, up here. There was speed, and exhilaration. Maybe the chances of death were greater, but a man lived more, in less time. When death did come, it was less messy. A puff of flame—a broken ship—a flailing form. That was all.

Something drew tight within him. He

remembered, suddenly, Ralph McQuade. A deep growl rippled his throat.

He saw, suddenly, the shambles that was Nancy. He swung north across the line toward Vic. His hot eyes kept up constant search of the sky. There was no sign of a ship with invisible talons. There was no sign of any ship.

He gunned the Hisso for a mushroom cloud. Came out trailing wisps of down. And out of that same cloud came the Fokkers—eight of them! The whine of the diving Mercedes warned Tug. He wagged his wings in a swift signal, and swung the stick hard.

The Spad stood on a wing, and dropped a hundred feet. He shoved the stick in the corner and left-ruddered hard. The Spad whipped around in a corkscrew, facing the dropping Jerries. He had time for one swift pumping on the trips. Vickers tracers lashed futilely across the taut air. No chance for a hit. The Fokkers were dropping like some mad demons.

Through slitted eyes, Tug watched a Spad spew smoke and spin for the ground. He saw the Boches flatten out and zoom back up. Hunched over the stick like some figure of wood and cloth, he watched them come. He was ready for them.

Even as he watched them, he shook his head. There was no sign of the red D-7. Tug twisted his Spad around and caught a black-crossed belly in his rings. His thumbs snapped at the trips. The Vickers bucked in a short blast of death. The Spad jerked to the recoil. Then the black-crossed belly became red, painted with fire.

At the same time, Spandau slugs beat into Tug's left wing panel. He could see the tracer smoke as the lead knifed through the fabric. One look he flashed back, just one. Through the propshen of the Mercedes he could see the red snouts of the Spandaus.

Instinctively he kicked the rudder. That

was the right move—left rudder, and slip. He pushed the stick across. Before he could complete the maneuver, he saw his mistake. The man on his tail was no ordinary air fighter. He was a veteran; one who guessed a man's movements before they were made. The Spandau slugs searched him out. They battered in a dull tattoo across his panel; flicked leather from the rim of the cowling.

Tug didn't wait for more. He shoved the stick away from him as if it were some leprous thing. The Spad nosed over quickly, screamed down with audible ferocity. Grimly Tug held to that dive. Let the Fokker come after him. He'd match dives with a Fokker anytime. Like some huge flesh-and-bone bird in agony, that ship screamed down. Tug could feel himself pushed back against the crashpad as though by a huge hand. He could feel the air sucked from his very lungs.

Then he came to the right spot. A hundred times before he'd reached this place. Now was the time to pull out. Even if the Fokker was on your tail, here is where you lost him. With a steady pull Tug eased the Spad out of that dive.

His whole body seemed to contract with the force of breaking that dive. Blood beat into his eyeballs—into his brain. His ears were filled with strange noises. He felt as though he was about to die. But he didn't die. He rode that circuit around, and below him, saw the Fokker whirling into eternity with a wing panel pulled from the hinge pins.

SWIFTLY he zoomed up to the fight. Unconsciously he counted the odds. He was two Spads short. There were five Fokkers left against his six Spads. Easy money! Far across the fight, he saw the bony face of Beagle, like a skeleton head, hunched across the stick of a Spad.

Tug reached for the throttle. Before he could gun the Hisso, he jerked stiff

in his pit. Out of a small cloud, directly above Beagle, flashed the wings of a red D-7!

Beagle couldn't see the D-7. Tug knew that Beagle couldn't see it. With a voice filled with terror, Tug shouted, "For God's sake, Beagle, roll over! Go down!"

His puny words were whipped away by the slipstream. His hot eyes were glued to that red ship. His flat thumb pressed the throttle against the quadrant stop. The Hisso blasted into life. Like a mad thing Tug flung his Spad across the fight. He wanted to reach Beagle—wanted to help him.

Tug's teeth were set tight. He knew just what he had to do. The red ship was his meat. Yet even as he thought these thoughts, he knew that he would be too late. Scarcely daring to breath, Tug watched that Jerry ship drop down. Like some line of fire it screamed across the blue of the sky.

Tug beat his hand impotently against the cowling. He hoped his men had been wrong. No ship could strike a man with anything that could cause him to leap out of his pit and have his head fall off. It couldn't be done! It couldn't be—

Glassy-eyed, he watched the red Fokker flatten out. Then it happened—swiftly—suddenly! Fully ten feet above Beagle, that red D-7 flashed across his head. Tug jerked forward. At that very instant, Beagle leaped into the air as though shot from a catapult!

Arms flailing, legs sprawled and kicking, he seemed, for one instant, to follow the flight of the Fokker. Then he dropped like some dead weight. Tensely Tug waited, but Beagle's head didn't fall off!

A cold, blind fury beat through Tug like some maddening drug. He flung his Spad screaming for the red Fokker. Mouthing curses, he caught the red blur in his rings. Like blood, that body flowed

across the sights. Too far away! Too far—wait! Now!

Just as his thumbs beat down, he saw them come. Four Fokkers beating in close about him. His tracers bit into a black tail. Spandau slugs tore slaunchways through his struts. He tried to throw the Spad into a circle, but black-crossed wings hemmed him in. He couldn't get a shot at the red ship. The rest of the Jerries were protecting it. There was only one way Tug could go to get out of that hail of Spandau lead. Down!

Down he went once more, wind screaming through the wire like a live, animal thing; struts jerking and stuttering in the sockets. He didn't look back. His face glared grimly into that awful impact of air. He'd got rid of one Fokker by this method. Why not four more!

Once more he belied the stick. Once more that whirlpool tried to crush and mangle him. Once more he searched the sky for his pursuers, with bleary eyes. He jerked stiff. The Fokkers hadn't followed him down. With a sick feeling he discovered his mistake. In that split second he understood the German's strategy.

Like flame that red D-7 flashed upon him. Like some blood-drenched death bird it screamed out of its dive, and flattened out above his head.

Instinctively Tug threw his arm up. Even before the motion was completed something struck at his arm like a whip-lash. He could feel the sting and cut of it. Then it struck his head. He could feel it pull tight like the grip of mighty talons. With a vicious jerk, his helmet was swept away. He could feel the jerk and snap as the fastenings let go. Then the red ship was past.

Breathing heavily like a man who finds himself suddenly snatched from the claws of death, Tug rubbed a hairy hand across his jaw. There was a sore spot on his

jaw, where the chin straps of the helmet had broken free.

He was shocked and dazed by the speed of the whole thing. His head ached from the snap and jerk. Yet, deep within him he felt a certain joy. He believed that in that split second he had discovered the nature of the red Fokker's talons. He made no move to follow the red ship home. His jaw set in a grim line, he gunned back to the ragged end of the dogfight and helped chase the last of the Boches back into *Deutschland*. Then he turned grimly toward Frouard and the home tarmac.

He didn't hurry home. He was the last one in. His mind had been too full of thoughts for speed. When he slid to a landing at Frouard, the rest of the flight were in the canteen getting their morning's snort.

Tug legged stiffly to the ground and turned his ship over to a mech. Without a word, he headed for the bar. Might as well face the music right now. If he had to pay, he'd pay. He, himself, had made the offer. With a rough shove, he swung the door of the canteen wide.

Without looking to right or left, he shuffled to the zinc-topped bar and ordered his drink. Before he could toss the slug home, he heard a sudden step behind him. He whirled and faced the men.

The grave faces of the men split into broad grins. Jig Stape was the man standing behind Tug.

"Well, captain, we're ready for the payoff," Stape told him.

Tug tried to stop the grin that struggled to his own lips.

"Payoff be damned," he told them. Instinctively he was looking for Beagle's bony face. It seemed like he could see that funny mug glaring at him through the cigarette smoke.

"You made the offer, and you made the terms," Stape reminded him.

Tug shrugged his shoulders. "And I made a damn fool of myself, too. I should've got the jump on that baby. I should've saved Beagle!"

It was Stape's turn to shrug.

"You didn't have a chance to save Beagle. You gotta admit you was plumb plenty surprised yourself when you saw that crate. He come danged near getting you captain."

"So what?"

"So we get your pants."

"You get my pants?"

"That's the general idea," Stape winked at the rest of the men.

"Well, if you get my pants, you'll have to take them," Tug told him quietly.

Stape jerked his head. For the moment, the grim horror of war was forgotten. The men piled upon Tug and bore him to the floor. Arms and legs waved wildly through the air. Grunts, curses and laughter echoed through the long room. Finally, the mob dispersed. Tug rose panting, and pantless, to his feet. Stape waved the O. D.'s gleefully above his head.

Those pants were torn into enough pieces that each man of the flight might have a souvenir. Tug downed his drink, and turned to the men with a wide grin.

"I'm a honest man and I pay my debts."

"With a little coaxing," Stape cut in.

"All right, have it your way. But get this straight: the next time I am going to get that Jerry with the talons. I'm going to get him right, too." With those significant words, he stalked out of the canteen, and across the tarmac, sans pants.

THAT afternoon, Tug was busy. He had a plan and the plan called for a certain amount of work. With thin, steel wires, he built a double arch across

the top of his pit. The arch was invisible a short way from the ship. At the top of the arch, was a hook. The rest of the contraption was made in the quiet of his own room.

At dawn, Tug was the first man on the line. He loaded a white bundle into his ship, and fastened a line from the white bundle to the hook at the top of the thin, steel arch. This done, he waited for the rest of the flight to show up.

When the men did come, he took Jig Stape aside.

"I'm going to get that red D-7 today, but I'll need a little help. When that Jerry shows up, I'm going for him. See? The rest of you lay off. If any other Fokkers try to bar me out, take care of 'em, will you? I've got to get under that D-7 myself. I don't want anybody else to take any chances. Keep clear of that red Fokker!"

Stape nodded agreement. Tug turned and swung his long body into the small pit of his plane. It seemed as though that body shrunk in size to enable it to get into that pit. Tug inspected his apparatus. He gunned the Hisso in a flare of thunder.

Grimly, he looked along the line. The flight was ready. Lifting a hand he signaled for chocks out. The Hisso roared, trembling the Spad with the power surge. Then the Spad was leaping forward eagerly.

Tug circled for position and waited for the rest of the planes. Then he cut straight as a die for the front lines. As he did the day before, he turned north when the whitened bones of Nancy drifted under his trucks. Again, at Vic, he searched the sky eagerly.

This time, there was no surprise. He saw the Fokkers outlined against the halo of the rising sun like a black line of shadows. He wagged his wings, and fed soup to the Hisso. These Boches were

in regular formation—a 'V' in steps with the leader at the top.

Gauging his chances, Tug suddenly flung his Spad screaming for the lowest Jerry on the left leg of the V. The Boches converged down upon him. It was just what he wanted. That way, the Boches were exposed, leaving the altitude to the rest of the Spads.

Those Spads knew how to use the advantage. Like winged fury, they dropped down upon the converging Fokkers. Two Fokkers fell with that first onslaught. Then the air became a thundering bedlam of twisting planes. Tug pulled out of that mass of Jerries with ribbons trailing from his wings. He hunched low in his pit. Held to the stick with a fixed purpose. But his squinted eyes couldn't see the red Fokker anywhere in the air.

A Fokker crept upon Tug's tail. The beat of the Spandau lead was his first warning.

He jerked a look back. His blood-shot eyes saw Stape gunning in sideways for the Jerry. Vickers snorting red streams of fire, Stape knocked the Fokker off. Tug waved a hand in thanks. Then he slipped low, and zoomed up on the edge of the fight. Quickly he searched the air. Nowhere could he see the red D-7. Nowhere could he—

Tug jerked stiff in his pit with the thought unfinished. Riding the slant rays of the sun, it came. The red Fokker!

Tug gave one look at his apparatus. He beat his hand against the steel arch to test it. A growl of satisfaction rippled his chest. Now came the time for the test. If he were right—

Tug gunned the Hisso. Like some huge dragon in pain, that mighty engine roared and pounded. The Spad leaped forward to the suck of the prop. But Tug wasn't the only one who had seen the red ship coming down. The Heinies had seen it, and Stape had seen it.

EVEN as Tug gunned his ship to get under the D-7, the Fokkers closed in upon him.

Like some mad thing, he hurtled through the air. As he flung up, his landing wheels strummed across the wingtip of a black plane, so close was the passing.

Clearing that first plane, he cut down again. Another Jerrie shot across his nose, barring his way. He dropped his thumbs on the trips. The Jerry spun crooked, minus a rudder. There were still more Boches ahead of him. And he saw, screaming through them, the yellow Spad belonging to Stape.

A thrill of pride coursed through Tug. Stape was taking chances, long chances; taking them recklessly, with superb daring. Like a twin-tongued messenger of death Stape crashed through those Fokkers. His wingtip shaved a Fokker tailskid. His backwash sent a Fokker floundering helplessly.

And at that instant, fear clutched Tug's chest like a huge hand. He saw the red Fokker swooping down! And it was swooping upon Stape, who had no knowledge of its coming!

Tug glared hotly at the Fokker coming slaunchways across his prop. Instinctively he shouted, "dodge, Stape, he's striking for you!" Puny words—useless words. And with those words, Tug felt himself go hard and cold inside.

Suddenly, he felt himself become something more than human. He seemed to be part of that thundering engine of steel and iron; to be one with the screaming plane of spruce and cloth. As though by physical force, he lifted the Spad over the Jerry in front of him. Teeth clenched, eyes set and staring, he gauged the distance. As though that space had been measured with giant micrometers, he flung the Spad between Stape's topdeck and

the swooping, downrushing Boche plane!

Tug knew just what he was doing. He could feel his wheels beat across Stape's topdeck. He could even see Stape's white face looking up at him, frozen with horror. Then Stape lurched free, and the red Fokker flattened out.

This time Tug knew what to expect. He jerked a look up. The red belly was only six feet above him. The Jerry had seen that play of Tug's too late. No time now to draw in his talons! He had to snatch what meat he could.

Like a hair of silver, something twanged against the side of Tug's Spad. Tug tensed. That striking thing slid up over the thin steel arch above his pit, with a singing sound. There was the click of striking metal. The hook at the top of the thin steel arch let go.

Out of Tug's Spad was jerked a bundle of white cloth. The bundle unfolded, trailed out for a fraction of a second and then mushroomed into a huge white flower. A parachute! Hung to the red death-demon!

Tug spun the Spad in a vertical. The chute cut the speed of the D-7, like a huge brake. There was no running away this time. Like a cat pouncing upon a mouse, Tug pounced upon that red ship. He could see the white, terror-stricken face of the Boche trying to tear himself free of the dragging chute.

Calmly, deliberately, Tug thumbed the trips. Vickers lead spilled in a deadly stream straight into the pit of the red plane. One short burst, no more. The Boche, who had jerked men into oblivion with his invisible talons, was now thrown clear of his own plane as the Fokker turned lazily on its back.

The rest of the Germans seeing this ignoble end of their star ace, turned tail with mad speed, and raced toward home. Tug looked down. They were over No-Man's-Land. The red Fokker was drop-

ping directly below him. But it wasn't falling as a plane should fall. It was bouyed up by the sustaining power of the chute. A brisk wind from the east was blowing the chute and plane back of the French lines.

Tug and Stape followed the Jerry ship down. It fell in a field near the battered remnants of a railroad track. Tug dropped his Spad close to the spot and legged out. Stape was close behind him. Without a word they both ran over to the German ship.

Silently they examined the wreckage. In the pit of the Fokker was a reel wound with fine, steel wire. The wire went through a hole in the bottom of the fuselage. On the end of the wire was a slip noose. The slip noose was pulled tight around the hook of the chute that had been fastened to the steel arch over Tug's pit.

"So that's the answer," Stape said in a musing voice.

"That's the answer," Tug told him. "He'd catch that steel wire around a man's head and yank him out of his plane. The wire happened to cut McQuade's head off. See that catch, the one on the floor board?"

Stape nodded in answer.

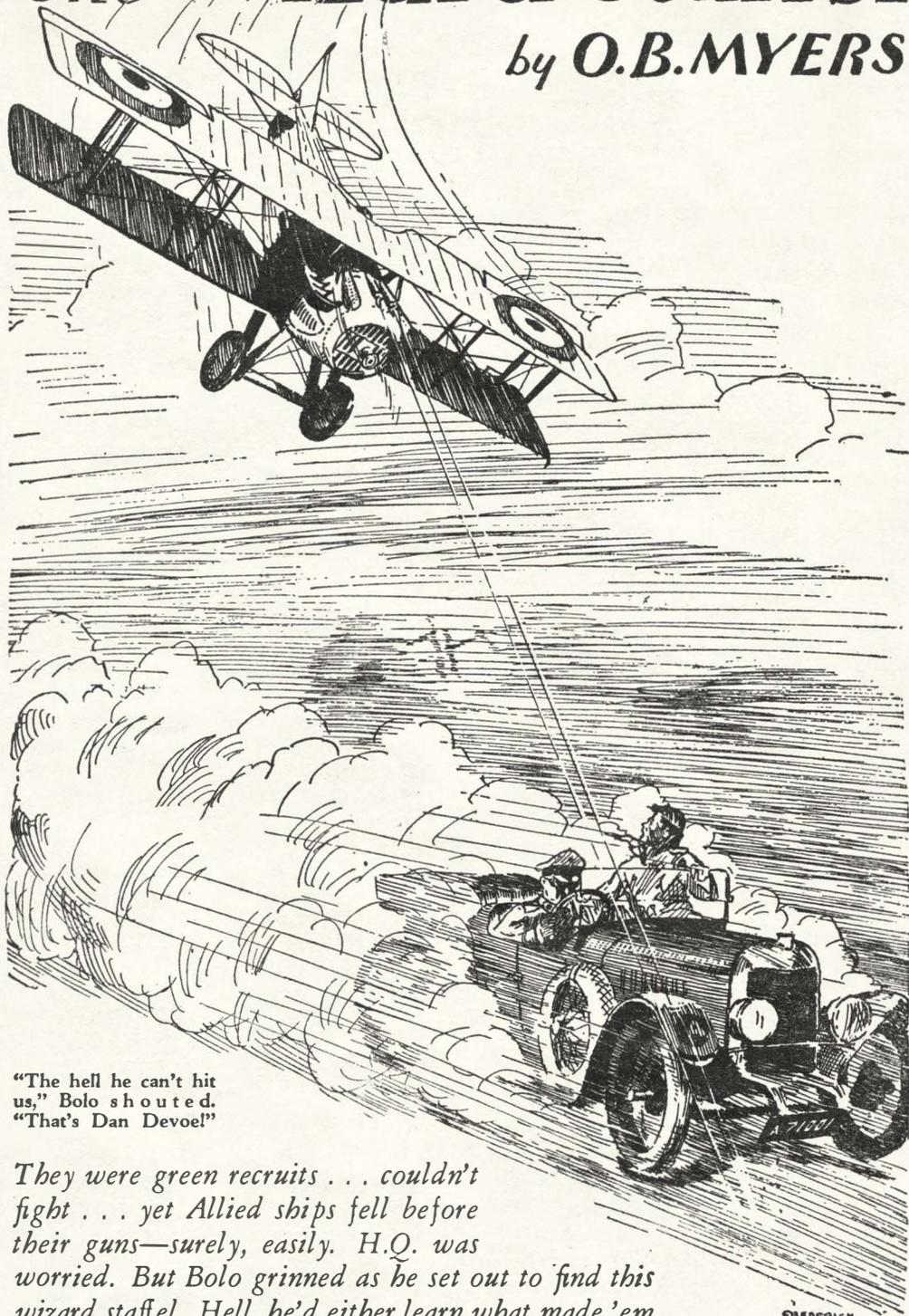
"Well, when he caught a man, he'd kick that catch, and let him drop. But the pull of that chute was so steady and slow that it jammed the catch. I doped it out when he nearly caught me yesterday. I could hear the wire strum past my head. So I built that arch so the wire would slide over that and catch onto the hook holding the chute."

Stape regarded him with open admiration. "Some scheme, captain. You deserve to get your pants back for that one."

"Try and get 'em," Tug growled, remembering the number of pieces into which they had been divided.

The Wizard Staffel

by O.B. MYERS



"The hell he can't hit us," Bolo shouted.
"That's Dan Devoel!"

They were green recruits . . . couldn't fight . . . yet Allied ships fell before their guns—surely, easily. H.Q. was worried. But Bolo grinned as he set out to find this wizard staffel. Hell, he'd either learn what made 'em tick or teach 'em a couple of new tricks—with Yank bullets!

FREDERICK
GLANVILLE

“**B**OLO” Bickerton deserved his nickname. When it was a matter of discipline, he was as wild and untamable as a bush-ranging, knife-wielding cannibal. No brass-bound regulations could hem him in; but in a fight his daring was superb. Order him to cover the sector between the canal and the forest; he covered it, but probably ten miles behind the German lines.

Tell him to seek a scrap five thousand meters above Verdun, and he was apt to come back asking confirmation on a Boche shot down at five hundred meters over Conflans, forty kilometers away. “There weren’t any square-heads around Verdun,” he would explain with a careless shrug.

Give him a two-hour mission strafing trenches, and he would be back three times in the two hours to re-fill belts. Once he flew so low in a ground strafe that a trench knife, hurled upward from a German hand, was found sticking in the axle fairing of his Spad after he had landed.

“He’s always shooting off his mouth about what he is going to do,” someone had once remarked about Bolo.

“Yes,” had come Dan Devoe’s retort, “but what makes you mad is that then he goes out and does it.”

Bolo let his ship roll gently through a patch of bumpy air, and grinned as he glanced across at the Spad near his right wing-tip.

Dan hadn’t been so eager about this voluntary patrol. But Dan had come along with him, which was more than some of the others would do. That was just like Dan. He never sought out trouble, but when trouble came he was ready for it. He lacked Bolo’s fire and dash, but made up for it by his steady, unswerving loyalty and cool assurance. You could always depend on Dan; he never let you down.

The bulletin from H. Q. had been posted in operations office that morning.

Casualty reports for the past week show that we have lost more planes in the sector just east of the river than in any other two sectors of like size. There being no apparent reason, it is important to learn whether the enemy is making special efforts to keep us out of that region, or whether they have moved in one of their crack staffels, either of which might indicate preparations for a push. Pilots are hereby warned of the danger in that sector, and requested to report the insignia seen on German planes sighted between Dun and Lassay.

“Say, that sounds interesting,” Bolo had exclaimed. “Let’s sashay over that way and take a look, this afternoon.”

“Orders say to stay this side of the river,” was Dan’s reply.

“Nuts, let’s do a voluntary, then. Come on, we’ll have plenty of time before the three o’clock. Who’s going?”

There was no chorus of replies. Not that his fellow pilots were lacking in courage; but facing ever-present death for an hour and fifty minutes at a stretch, three times a day, was more than enough for most of them. Voluntary patrols in between times were left to those in less active sectors, or to rare spirits like Bolo himself.

Dan, however, fumbled for his helmet and drew it on slowly.

“You never get any sense in your head, do you, Bolo? Well, I suppose I’ll have to go along to hold your hand.”

So with Dan at his heels, Bolo had taken off, and now, with Dan’s Spad still nudging his flank, he was winging across the lines at two thousand meters.

Entering German territory at the point where the trenches crossed the river, he turned northeast, striking squarely into the forbidden area which the Jerries appeared to have labelled, “Dangerous—Keep Out!”

But he did not barge ahead blindly. His eyes constantly searching the sky in front, above, below, to either side, and occasionally to the rear, and he knew that Dan, like himself, was doing the same. Bolo might be reckless, but he was far from stupid.

After five minutes' straight flight he gave vent to a scornful grunt, and wheeled in an easy bank. Who said this was perilous air? They hadn't even sighted an enemy plane! Even the earth looked peaceful.

It was a region of flat-topped hills and irregular, straggling valleys where the foliage was still green. What roads there were generally followed the valleys toward the Meuse, roughly paralleling the lines, and were therefore unsuited to the movement of troops up and back; they seemed almost strangely deserted. It was inconceivable that a push could be brewing in this quiet sector.

As his turn straightened out, however, his glance was caught and held by a speck on the white ribbon of a road below. It appeared to be an automobile, standing next to a triangular wood, on the other side of which was a rolling field.

Being well over ten miles behind the Front, it was quite possible that those trees might hide a division P. C., or a regimental headquarters, at least. Bolo's itching fingers had reached for his triggers when a red flash seared across his vision.

His head jerked up. The flare had come, of course, from Dan's cockpit, and was a warning. Its cause was not hard to find. The three Fokkers, approaching from the south had perhaps been following them for some distance, or perhaps were just on their way back from a patrol.

It made no difference. They saw what was ahead of them, and the V formation

spread itself slightly, in the way that a man lifts and spreads his arms when about to grapple with an opponent. In less time than it takes to say it, a machine gun chattered harshly.

Dan had started a turn to the west, evidently with the canny idea of getting between the Fokkers and the sun. But Bolo put his trust in a bold, sudden stroke, knowing both by instinct and from experience, that the first blow was often the last. He zoomed quickly, taking what altitude he could, and then rushed headlong at the nearest foe.

THE German pilot, however, preferred a different game; the Fokker swerved, banked sharply to elude his blast of smoking tracers, and curved into a defensive spiral.

Bolo, following up closely, whirled in pursuit. The spiral tightened, but he neither gained nor lost position; the Fokker could turn as deftly as the Spad.

For some moments they spun, back to back, like puppets about a pivot, the faint trail of their exhausts intermingling to sketch a hazy circle in the sky.

Clinging grimly to his taut controls, Bolo watched for the break. Sooner or later the Boche must straighten out of that endless spiral; then would be his chance to slash in with a driving, relentless attack.

Wondering why the Jerry held so long to this defensive maneuver, Bolo suddenly remembered that there were others about.

At the very instant when he cocked his head sideways, to look upward, the cold crackle of Spandaus pierced the roar of his motor.

His reaction was instantaneous and automatic, yet was barely enough to save him. He pushed the stick from him, held it there. Then as his ship, poised vertically, began to drop, he wrenched it out

of the side-slip with a jerk and careened into a roll.

A splinter from the instrument board flicked into his lap, and right next to the gas gauge he saw a bullet hole. The angle of the hole told him that the missile must have passed within inches of his neck, and he came as close as a man of courage ever can to fear. That is to say, he was seized with a fierce anger, at himself.

"Damn me for a fool!" he muttered. "Watch yourself, Bolo!"

Flipping out of the roll, he glanced backward. One Fokker swung unhurriedly toward his flank, but a quick sweep of the eye found no others close. The one who had fired that burst, then, must have pulled off abruptly when he dodged.

Seizing his chance, Bolo whipped over in a split-air and knifed into a charge. But the German repeated his former tactics, avoiding the direct challenge to wheel into a spiral.

Again Bolo pursued hotly, and this time his tighter turns forced the Fokker into a series of Innemmanns.

Twice Bolo had a target for a brief instant, and twice his stabbling bursts grazed the black-crossed cockpit. Close, but not quite close enough. The next time he'd get that Boche!

The Fokker was in a spiral again. Damn the fellow; was he trying to tire the Spad out by his continuous defensive play? Well, Bolo could play that game, too. Let him spiral as long as he wanted; when he came out, the Vickers would be waiting to welcome him.

The zenith reeled over Bolo's left ear; the horizon rushed endlessly through his center section. Holding maximum pressure on his stick, he fought off dizziness. In this position he had nothing at which to fire; but neither did his opponent. Until one or the other made a break, it was a stalemate. Unless—

He did not hear the brief hammer of the Spandaus. The only sound that reached him was the sharp spat of metal on metal, followed instantly by a kind of diminishing whine.

It was by the feel that he knew his motor had been hit. The controls, up to this moment taut and quivering, suddenly grew limp and flabby as the pull of his two hundred horsepower faded away to nothing.

His whirling spiral slackened to a skidding turn, and he kicked his nose downward just in time to prevent its turning into a helpless spin.

The sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach did not destroy his judgment nor throw his nerves into a panic. He knew immediately that he was headed for a forced landing, but he remembered that there was at least one foe close to his tail still. While he zigzagged downward in a steep glide, his eyes searched the ground below and ahead.

In the midst of the rough, uninviting terrain his eye again lit on that triangular wood, and the field next to it. Perhaps the ground rolled a bit, but at least it was open, and was infinitely better than rocks and trees and ditches.

He feinted a swoop in the opposite direction, used up a thousand meters in a vertical side-slip, and came out swinging toward the woods. His motor was utterly dead and silent now, and only the ghostly swish of wind through wires heralded his approach to earth.

He was careful to make a slow, three-point landing, but the field proved to be even better than he had hoped. His wheels touched on an upward slope, which checked his speed, and after rolling easily over a smooth crest, came to a halt in the next shallow depression.

Typically, his first thought was not of himself. His glance went to the sky above. Two Fokkers, at some distance apart, cir-

cled warily; but no other planes could he see.

Had Dan brought down the third, and then escaped toward the lines? Or had Dan, too, been sent down, perhaps in flames, taking the Boche with him? Bolo could not tell; the woods prevented his seeing very far toward the south, and the movements of the two Jerries overhead conveyed no clue.

Dropping his eyes, he was aware that a man was trotting toward him from the woods on his left. His instinctive action was to slap his belt open and push himself upward out of the cockpit. But he saw at once that the jig was up.

The man wore the field-gray of a German uniform, with an officer's gold braid at shoulder and cuffs, and a Luger holstered about his waist. Where there was one Boche, there were doubtless more. Resistance would only be a futile form of suicide.

Carefully keeping his hands in plain sight, Bolo jumped down and waited. The approaching figure began to speak while still a rod away.

"I THINK you fooled 'em, all right. You certainly made it look as if you were being shot down."

Whatever Bolo had expected to hear, it was not that. He could only stare in a sort of stupefaction as the other went on rapidly.

"By God, you were long enough getting here. I'd almost given up hope. When did you get the word from Colonel Wharton?"

To Bolo's increased amazement, he realized that this German officer was addressing him English. Not the stiff, labored English of a foreigner, but the fluent phrases of a born American, or a Britisher at least. Yet as far as Bolo was concerned, he might as well have been uttering sen-

tences in Sanskrit. Bolo, wondering if he were dreaming, finally found his voice.

"What—Colonel Wharton? Who is he?"

"Why, he is—" The German officer caught the words which were on his lips.

His attitude changed with startling abruptness. His black eyes veiled themselves, his angular face hardened into a mask. He crouched slightly, like a man who senses a trap, and his hand touched the Luger in its holster. His question was like a naked sword.

"Who are you?"

"Bickerton, 1st lieutenant, 82nd Spads, Major Shotton commanding. Here's my identification card, if you want to see it.

The dark eyes watched him with evident suspicion while he fished the paste-board from his pocket and held it out. The stranger kept his right hand on the butt of his gun while he took the card with his left and examined it closely.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded. "You had instructions from someone to land on this field?"

"Hell, no. We didn't even have instructions to fly in this sector. It was my own idea. We got mixed up in a scrap with those three Jerries, and one of the lucky devils shot me down, that's all."

"Shot you down? You mean your plane is crippled?"

"Of course it's crippled. Conked, motor killed. Do you think I'd come down and land here just for fun? Say, what is all this about, anyway? Are you a German officer, or aren't you?"

The man before him studied Bolo intently for another moment without speaking. Then he shrugged, and cursed with great feeling.

"My blasted luck! It was good, right up to Friday. Now it seems to be running out. That usually means—" He checked himself with a slight cough. "I suppose

I might as well explain. You seem to be O.K., and you might be of some help yet. To the Germans I'm *Kapitan Vogel*, at present on detached duty from 4th army headquarters. To everybody in the American intelligence service, except Colonel Wharton, the chief, I'm known simply as Ninety. That'll have to do for you, too, for the present.

"This particular field, being in a quiet neighborhood, has been used up to now as a pick-up for those of us wishing to return across the lines. I've been waiting here, expecting a plane to carry me over. Instead, you drop in. Gave me a bad moment or so, at first; I thought the Boches were springing one of their clever traps, perhaps."

Bolo listened in suppressed astonishment, but grasped the situation quickly.

"The plane you're looking for may come along any minute. Perhaps I'd better get out of sight."

"Not much chance, now," the other said gravely. "It's four days since I sent the agreed message to the colonel, by the usual underground channels. If my man isn't here by this time, the word must have miscarried. Plenty of ways that could happen. And I couldn't send another signal; too much risk. This forced landing of yours will attract attention to this field, damn it. No, I've got to think of some other way of getting my information across the lines."

"You know something of importance?" questioned Bolo.

"Of the greatest importance," said the other simply. He frowned thoughtfully for several moments, while his keen eyes surveyed Bolo appraisingly. "Look here, are you game for a risky bit of work?"

"Certainly," replied Bolo; not too quickly, but with a sure confidence that was heartening. "What is it?"

"You're a pilot, and I'm not. That means that you might be able to get back

across, where I couldn't. It also means that you can explain the device to the people back there even better than I could."

"The device? What device?"

"Come along; let's get away from here. This ship is useless, we can do nothing here. I've got an idea. While we're getting through the woods, I'll be giving you the dope."

With Bolo at his side, the man who was known as Ninety started across the field and shortly plunged into a path hidden under the trees. As they walked, he talked in quick, clipped sentences.

"It's a new sight for planes, invented by Greinstein. More than a sight; a mechanical brain. It figures deflection, speed, turning radius, all at once. The machine guns on the cowl, instead of being fixed, are set in swiveled trunnions, adjustable from the cockpit.

"There's a scale in front of the pilot, marked in figures. One figure means a Spad, another a Salmson, another a Nieuport. Then there's a sound tube, aligned with the guns. When it happens to be pointed directly at a source of sound, such as an enemy's motor, it operates automatically, firing the guns.

"It is simple to work. The pilot, seeing himself in combat with a Spad, for example, simply sets his scale to the Spad figure, which happens to be 84. Then he gets the Spad into a spiral, and waits. When his aim is perfect, and not before, the sound detector fires the guns for him. The bullets do the rest."

"But my God—it's incredible!" Bolo said.

"But it's a fact," was the blunt reply. "I've studied it closely, and seen tests. I know. This Greinstein is a mathematical wizard. He's a flyer, in command of Staffel 40. But he's more of a scientist than a pilot, really. Even insists on being addressed as *Herr Professor*.

"He has figured out on paper the correct angle to compensate for speed, deflection, turning radius, and so forth, for each Allied type of plane. God knows how many months that took. But the result is right. He has equipped Staffel 40 with his sights, and they've been successful."

"Say," exclaimed Bolo suddenly, "does that outfit fly this sector? Was that who I ran into this afternoon?"

"Their drome is only a few miles north of here," was the reply, "and those Fokkers were from Staffel 40, yes."

"No wonder we've been losing a lot of planes in this region lately! And no wonder that Jerry brought me down so easily!"

"Exactly. And it will be no wonder, when all the German planes are so equipped, if the Allied ships aren't driven from the sky completely!"

"But what in thunder can be done against it?" Bolo demanded.

The man by his side shrugged pessimistically.

"That's up to our engineers, our own inventors. If they can't figure out an answer, we're done for. It's beyond me."

AT this moment they emerged from the forest on the edge of a road. Bolo started back, for a short distance away stood a dark gray touring car with serial numbers stenciled on its doors.

"It's all right; come on. That's my car." And as he stepped into the driver's seat, Bolo's companion continued, "Here's my plan. We'll drive to the drome of Staffel 40, where I'm known as Vogel. I'll say that I captured you as you were trying to escape from your plane, and that I want to question you. In that way, I can at least get you inside the limits of the field. Then you'll have to watch your chance. There are lots of Fokkers there, all equipped with Greinstein's new sight. Somehow, you've got to get hold of one, and make a

run for the lines. The details are up to you."

"O.K.," said Bolo curtly. "I'll try it."

He spun the crank, and the engine started up with a throaty sputter. The man at the wheel let in the clutch, and Bolo slid into the front seat.

The car picked up speed as its driver shifted into second, and then into high. The narrow road wound uphill, but soon they were taking the curves at forty or more.

"Remember, I'm a stranger to you," cautioned Bolo's companion. "Don't address me by any name at all, not even Vogel. And if I get rough, threaten you, don't forget to act scared."

"Right," muttered Bolo.

He was thinking that this man was indeed a stranger to him. The name of Vogel was false, and the term of Ninety meant less than nothing. He was merely a cog in an enormous espionage machine, in which Bolo himself was now also a cog.

The car turned a corner, and now the speedometer needle began to climb higher still. This road was straight and flat, running along a kind of open plateau toward the northeast, but carried no traffic in mid-afternoon.

At fifty miles an hour the din of the engine made conversation difficult, and there seemed nothing more to say, anyway. Bolo sat stiffly on the seat, trying to digest the startling things he had been listening to, until something made his scalp tingle.

What was that? The clatter of the car's engine was gradually submerged in another sound, a deep, menacing bellow that seemed to strike his ears from all sides at once.

He glanced to either side, but saw nothing. Then he twisted his head to look up. At that moment the steady thunder of noise was stabbed by a succession of sharp, metallic raps.

"Hey—look out!" he yelled. "That plane's shooting at us!"

The man at the wheel either did not hear him, or paid no attention. The car increased in speed.

The plane had passed overhead now and was swinging into a bank. Bolo's first glance had told him it was a Spad; now he saw the number painted on the side of the fuselage. It was Dan!

"We'd better stop!" he yelled. "He'll fire again!"

The man at his side, without removing his eyes from the road, said something out of the corner of his mouth. All Bolo caught was the phrase, "—can't hit us."

"The hell he can't! That's Dan Devoe; he'll ditch us!"

But the driver only bent lower over the wheel and stared through narrowed eyes at the ribbon which unwound before him. Bolo peered upward again.

It was easy to guess the reason for his comrade's presence up there. After fighting his way free of the Fokkers, he had doubtless missed Bolo. Instead of streaking for the lines immediately, he had watched his chance and returned to the scene of the scrap to learn what he could of Bolo's mishap. The Spad, standing in the field by the wood, had told him little; he must have circled off to the north, until his eye fell on a lone automobile hastening along an empty road.

His reasoning was obvious; strafing staff cars was one of Dan's favorite diversions. And Bolo wished fervently that almost anyone else was up there, behind those angry Vickers.

The Spad, having out-distanced the slower car, now came round behind again by making a short circle. The roar of its exhausts swelled in volume as its nose went down, and was punctured by a staccato crackle faster and more venomous than a pneumatic drill.

Slender gray tracer streaks reached out

from its cowl, searching mercilessly for the target below. Bolo groaned aloud and started waving his arms, hoping Dan would pay attention.

"Dan! For God's sake wait—"

He turned frantically to the driver, opened his mouth, to shriek a second warning. But before he could speak there came a faint *pop!* The car gave a short lurch, straightened again. At the same instant the man behind the wheel went white as chalk.

The steadying of the car was only momentary; in another second it was swaying careening drunkenly. Bolo knew that a tire had been hit and punctured; he could hear it shriek against the paved surface of the road.

To control the plunging machine would be a difficult task at best, and now to his horror he saw that the driver's hands had frozen in a tight grip on the wheel.

He tried to do three things at once, and almost succeeded. He cut the switch on the dash, knocked the other's hands aside, and grabbed the wheel himself.

Had it not been for a slight curve he might still have saved the car. But the right wheels were in the ditch almost at once, and the spokes were nearly torn from his grasp. Fighting desperately, he tried to get back on the road and slow down. But the other man's legs prevented his foot from finding the brake, and then he came upon the stone by the roadside.

There was a splintering crash, and a jarring shock. The car bounded into the air, turned broadside, and landed half on its back with a final terrific slam.

BOLO recovered his breath and pulled himself together, disentangling his limbs slowly from the twisted wreck of the seat.

"Holy smoke!" he muttered. "Come on, let's get out of this."

He pushed the other man off his shoul-

der, and noticed that his body felt very limp. He shook him, and then stared in mute horror.

His companion was slumped forward against the dash, his wide open eyes still peering straight ahead. But now Bolo saw the neat round hole at the very base of his skull, and knew that Ninety was dead.

For a while, probably only a few seconds, a kind of dazed lethargy gripped him. Things were happening too fast; his mind had to have a chance to catch up.

Fifteen minutes ago he had not known there was such a person in the world. Now this strange man had paid his last debt of duty, and gone on, leaving to Bolo the end of his task.

To some men the hopelessness of the situation would have been staggering. But not so to Bolo. His was a nature which courted the impossible, and fed on obstacles. The very difficulties of his position sharpened his ambition; the dangers of his future were like wine to his blood.

As his head cleared, hope blossomed afresh. He would pull through yet. At least he was still alive, and loose on his feet. But in another moment the last catastrophe befell him with stunning suddenness.

He was clambering stiffly through the disjointed top to the side of the road when a car whirled round a nearby curve. He did not need to glance at it to know that it spelled danger. Immediately he remembered the Luger, strapped around his companion's waist.

He dived back into the mess of the front seat and felt around wildly. But the impact of the crash had dislodged the gun from its holster, which was now empty; his searching fingers found nothing. Then brakes squealed, and a deep voice commanded him to raise his hands.

The two Germans who leapt from the tonneau of the halted car were, he saw at

once, aviators. It was not hard to guess that they were the two against whom he had fought a short time earlier, and who were now on their way back to investigate, the spoils of victory.

They stared at him in suspicious astonishment, and one began to ask a series of questions. Was he a pilot? Had he just been shot down? What was he doing here? Who was the officer, dead in the wrecked car?

The questions were in German; Bolo merely shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. He knew the language well enough to understand their meaning, and could have replied with fair fluency. But a lightning-like impulse made him feign ignorance. He had not yet given up all hope, and it was just as well to have a card up his sleeve.

They searched him, and examined his identity card with great interest, nodding at each other eloquently. Soon a truck with trailer attached appeared, also coming from the north. It halted, and the two officers held a conference with its driver and crew, who evidently came from their own field.

Finally one of them mounted to the seat of the truck, which proceeded in the direction from which Bolo had just come. The other pushed Bolo into the tonneau of the touring car, and ordered the driver to return to his airdrome as fast as possible.

During the five mile drive there was no conversation whatsoever, though Bolo felt his companion's eyes on him curiously. Soon the car turned aside onto the tarmac of a large and busy drome where a dozen or more Fokkers stood before the hangars, and halted at one end of a long, low building. A minute later Bolo stood inside a small office.

While the German flyer described finding his prisoner, Bolo studied the unusual face of the C.O. behind the desk. It was a pale and ascetic countenance, slightly

bony, and so clean-shaven that the skin shone. The German's nose was long and thin and sharp, his dark eyes were crafty under their heavy lids. The brow, furrowed as if by constant thought, swept up into a mass of tightly crinkled, bushy hair.

"What were you doing in that automobile?" he demanded suddenly, addressing Bolo in faintly accented English.

Bolo's story was the simple truth, omitting one vital fact.

"That officer took me prisoner as I stepped from my plane. He was taking me along the road in his car, when a plane fired from above. He was killed at the wheel, and the car wrecked."

This explanation, tallying as it did with the flyer's report, was perfectly convincing, but the C.O., whom Bolo felt sure was Greinstein, glared as if he had wished to catch the Yankee in a lie. After a few more questions, he turned to the German pilot.

"See that he is locked up until tomorrow. Let me see—yes, in the storeroom at the other end of the shop."

"*Jawohl, mein Herr Professor,*" snapped the pilot, saluting.

AS he led Bolo from the office and down through the length of the building, the Yank's eyes opened in surprise. It was a fully-equipped machine shop, such as he had never seen near the Front, with lathes, drill presses, work-benches, and a large electric switchboard. Plainly this was where the inventor produced his superhuman sights. But giving him little time to look around, the German pushed him into a small room at the end, slamming and locking the door behind him.

The single window, securely barred, looked out across the tarmac, where over-alled figures bustled here and there among the planes. Turning his first attention to the interior, Bolo saw that the walls were

lined with shelves on which were stacked strips and rods of steel and brass, cartons of bolts and screws, cans of oil, lanterns, and miscellaneous items of shop equipment. Without definite hope he pried around in the corners, only to start back in tingling surprise.

Behind a box lay a small canvas tool-kit!

Jerking it open hastily, he saw that it held only a hammer, screw-driver, and three end-wrenches. They might do, however; he turned instinctively toward the window. But then he checked himself, and a moment later had hidden the kit again. This was no time to make a break, in broad daylight. He must wait for dark.

The hours passed slowly; the hope of escape, once roused in his mind, made him fretful, impatient. But just before sunset, gazing out of the window, he saw a truck pull up in front of the first hangar, and hooked to the trailer behind it was his Spad. Immediately a crowd of mechanics gathered round it and went promptly to work pulling off the cowl sections and examining the motor.

Night fell, but for a long time there were lights and the sound of movement from inside that hangar. Finally, when his watch said twelve, all was still. He got out the tools, and after waiting another half hour to be sure, set to work on the bars at the window. It was a heart-breaking task without a saw, especially in the pitch dark, and he dared not strike a solid blow with the hammer lest the noise betray him.

At last, however, he loosened one end of one bar with the screw-driver, and by putting forth all his strength wrenched it to one side. The faint groan of the metal as it twisted startled him, but he did not pause. Hastily he crammed the tools into his pocket; they might come in handy again later. Then he thrust one leg over the sill.

His only warning was a faint click behind him. Then the door was suddenly thrown open, and a shaft of light flooded into the room. He whirled aside, ready to throw himself on the intruder. But silhouetted in the doorway was a man holding a Luger in his out-stretched hand, and the man was Greinstein.

"So-o-o!" said the German, with eloquent emphasis.

Bolo muttered a curse of frustration. Whether the C.O. had been working in the shop all the time, or had just happened in at this unlucky moment, made no difference now. The jig was up.

"So our bird wished to fly the cage, eh?" sneered the Boche.

"You leave tools around. What the hell do you expect?"

"Hold your tongue! Face the wall!" Though his tone was harsh, Bolo detected in it a strange note, almost of gratified amusement. Holding the muzzle of the gun to Bolo's back, the German emptied his pockets of tools, which he tossed to the floor outside the door. Then he shouted for the corporal of the guard, to whom he gave curt instructions.

"Post one man on the door, and one outside the window. If he makes even a sound of moving, order him to be still. If he does not obey at once, shoot to kill." To Bolo he added in English, "I trust that you will have sense enough not to repeat this comedy."

The door closed leaving him in darkness. He reproached himself bitterly. Presented with one chance to escape, he had bungled it. When would he ever get another? He buried his head in his hands.

WITH the first streak of dawn he was at the window, staring past the sentry at the wakening field. Mechanics hurried about their work, planes were rolled out and started up and helmeted pilots took them off into the cold, gray sky.

Within an hour his gloom was redoubled by seeing his own Spad, evidently repaired during the night, soar away for a short hop in the hands of a grinning German.

Within a short time after it had landed, he was surprised to receive a visit from the C.O., and was surprised further still by his conversation. The inventor, eyeing him keenly, asked if he knew anything about the new sight. Bolo shook his head warily.

"Your Intelligence has not discovered, then, why Staffel 40 is shooting down so many of your aces?"

"We haven't lost any aces," countered Bolo stoutly

The German laughed unpleasantly.

"Our Intelligence does better. They inform me that you, C. J. Bickerton, were the leading pilot of the 82nd Pursuit, with twelve victories to your credit up to yesterday morning. Yet one of my recruits brought you down like a crow!"

Bolo feigned lack of interest, but the Boche went right on. With glowing eyes he described his marvelous invention, and spoke gloatingly of what it would do to the Allied squadrons. All staffels were not yet equipped with the Greinstein wonders, because the High Command had not yet consented to the steep price he demanded before revealing the secret for quantity manufacture. But when they were—ha! The war would be over. His assurance was insufferable.

Bolo, who saw that the German's dark eyes were studying him unceasingly, succeeded in holding his tongue imperturbably only because most of what he heard was not news to him. Yet he was puzzled. In all this boasting, this uncalled-for imparting of information, there was something unnatural, something off-key, but to save his life he could not guess what or why. Finally, with a taunt about how long it was going to be before he ever saw his comrades again, the C.O. departed.

From the window Bolo saw him cross the tarmac toward a row of waiting Fokkers. A score or more of men, mechanics and pilots, gathered about him, and he appeared to issue certain instructions. Then the pilots trotted toward the ships, Greinstein himself climbing into the cockpit of a Fokker with white wheels and tail-skid. Five minutes later, the last plane had taken off, the mechanics had disappeared into the hangars, and only Bolo's Spad was to be seen on the tarmac.

One mechanic still fussed over it diligently. He had the motor running once, and switched off; then he appeared unable to start it again, though he swung the prop vigorously. Finally he backed away, shaking his head. Then he glanced over his shoulder, and to Bolo's surprise came walking straight up to the window, past the guard.

"*Herr* Lieutenant!" he said cheerfully. "It iss nice motor in your plane, but the starter magneto, she not work right, *hein?*"

"Sure, it works," replied Bolo. "At least, it did, yesterday."

"Cannot good spark make, I t'ink," insisted the mechanic.

"You have to hold the handle in while you turn it—like this." Bolo tried to explain by gesture; the mechanic looked puzzled.

"Perhaps you vill come and show me," he suggested.

Bolo laughed without mirth, and glanced pointedly toward the armed sentry. "Sure, he vill let you," said the mechanic, and turned aside to say something in German. To Bolo's astonishment the guard, without even turning his head, replied by a nod. In a few moments the mechanic had come round through the shop and opened the door.

A feeling of tense expectancy made Bolo's stomach quiver as he followed the overalled figure toward the outer door.

Emerging onto the open field, he saw that it was practically empty; there were no officers about, and the only men in sight were inside the hangars. It seemed incredible; he almost had to pinch himself.

"It iss nice motor," the mechanic repeated. "I always like to make him work good. Work perfect!"

Bolo gave thanks for the passion for perfection possessed by this Jerry, and walked lightly on the balls of his feet. Approaching the silent Spad, his heart began to beat a little faster, and he calculated the distance to the other's chin. A wave of warm air from the open cockpit reminded him that the motor had just been running.

"Now look, Fritz. There's a ratchet on the handle. You push it in so, and then spin it—" His arm twisted awkwardly over the side of the cowl. "It's hard to do it, from outside."

"You can do easy from inside, *hein?*" grinned the German artlessly. "Get in, then. Get in, *ja.*"

The blood pounded with excitement in Bolo's temples as he vaulted familiarly into the cockpit. While the mechanic leaned close, he repeated his explanation, spinning the crank of the hand mag deftly. His left hand crept unnoticed to the switch, threw it to the "on" position. Taking a deep breath, he spun the starter mag again. No luck.

"See? She does not work. Why does the motor not start?"

Bolo wondered why, too. "Needs priming, I guess. Gas—"

"Wait. I turn her over some more times."

As if obeying a command from his *Kommandant*, the mechanic jumped for the prop, and gave it half a dozen quick tugs. Bolo felt as if he was having a dream, and would awake, cursing, any moment.

"All right! Come here and watch this time!"

The German started round the wing-tip. But Bolo did not wait. Flicking the switch over, he spun the hand mag furiously. The exhausts burst into a spatter of sound, and the seat vibrated under him. With one motion his fingers left the switch and pulled the throttle wide, and immediately the Spad shook itself and began to move forward.

From the tail of his eye he caught a glimpse of the mechanic waving both arms as he let out a yell. Then the ship was gathering speed as it rolled. He got the tail up, and she rolled faster still.

Just as the ground and the wheels parted company, he heard very faintly the crack of a rifle shot. As he climbed, he eased gently from side to side to spoil the shooter's aim, but heard no whine of bullets about his ears.

HALF a mile beyond the field he turned at right angles toward the south and looked back. A grin broke through his tight lips. The dopey fools—they were firing Very pistols after him! The German tarmac sprouted red and green flares like a fountain of colored fire. Besides being unbelievably stupid, they had lost their heads completely.

Pointing for the lines, he levelled off at five hundred meters and chuckled to himself. Then he saw the specks ahead, on his right. He changed his course slightly, only to see more specks on his left. He pulled up into a steep climb, only to find more above him. In the space of what seemed like a few seconds the specks grey, became Fokkers, and converged upon him as if drawn by a magnet.

He had scarcely put a mile behind him before he was hemmed in by foes who arrived as if to a rendezvous; in another moment one Fokker dove alone to whirl

upon his tail. He saw with horror that it had white wheels and tail-skid.

In a flash he understood. His escape had been too ridiculously easy to be true. They had deliberately let him escape! Greinstein, wishing to test out his sight in actual combat against a Spad, had coolly arranged matters to his taste. Finding, the previous night, that Bolo had the nerve to try it, he had simply made it easy for him to succeed. But not until he, with his dozen lieutenants, was ready and waiting in the clouds for the flashed signal.

As an individual duel, it would, of course, be a farce. A dozen reinforcements hovered near to see that nothing went wrong. And just to make sure, Bolo's first touch on the trigger told him that his ammunition belts had been removed.

A cold fury seized him as he realized his position. He was merely a guinea-pig for the inventor's experiment. Even without a special sight to pad the odds against him, how could he ever hope to elude thirteen foes, with silent guns? It was cold-blooded, mechanical murder. He was not a combatant, but a victim. A human sacrifice to Prussian scientific research.

By God, he'd show them a little flying first, though! He put his Spad through a series of wing-overs and renversements in such rapid succession that the white-wheeled Fokker could barely keep up, much less gain ground.

Then he went into a spiral to regain a little lost height. The Fokker spiraled with him, holding its own in a tight, nearly vertical, corkscrew. Suddenly he heard the staccato hammer of guns. A tracer flash bit across his vision, very close, and a center section wire within a foot of his face twanged as a slug sheered it clean.

He got out of that spiral as fast he could move his hand. But he could not stay out long. His frantic maneuvers brought him down dangerously close to

the ground; he had to recover altitude somehow.

A straight zoom would expose him to a direct burst from the rear. He could not attempt to out-run his antagonist; a perfect cloud of foes hemmed him in. Yet every time he wheeled into a climbing turn, those uncannily-aimed bursts whistled horribly close to his cockpit.

In desperation he writhed the Spad through one figure eight after another, and combed his brain for a straw at which to clutch. That sight was certainly doing all that its inventor claimed for it; he had the feeling that Greinstein could finish him off any moment he chose, was only playing with him to shatter his nerve before delivering the final, fatal blow. It was a diabolically ingenious device; but how the devil could a man outwit it?

His eyes, dropping inside his cockpit, chanced to fall on his switch. Its four positions were marked by white letters against the black bakelite. Off, R, L, and On. It was now in the last position, with both magnetos furnishing juice to the dual ignition system. Suddenly an idea leaped into his mind, born of the desperate necessity which faced him. His hand lifted, and moved the switch from 'On' to 'L.' The pull of the motor weakened perceptibly, but did not stop.

Again he was in a spiral. The flesh crawled on the back of his neck as he held it stubbornly. The brutal chatter of Spandaus reached his ears. Smoking tracer streaks sliced across his path. But although he now made no move to dodge, they hissed ten feet ahead of his whirling prop, missing his cockpit by as many more. A grim smile that was more like a snarl cracked his drawn face. He had the answer now.

WITH cool daring he stayed in the spiral, while the white-wheeled Fokker threw burst after burst. But every

bullet missed his Spad by exactly the same margin, no more and no less. His smile broadened. He could sense already the loss of confidence in his opponent.

The Fokker was beginning to wheel jerkily, uncertainly, as its pilot saw his volleys, which should have been perfectly aimed, going wild. Then with savage ferocity Bolo seized the offensive.

His Spad whipped up and over, and charged down like a mad bull, catching the Fokker flat-footed.

His guns were silent and empty, but that berserk plunge spelled certain collision unless avoided. The Fokker slid aside, and down. Bolo followed closely. The Fokker dipped steeper still. He pursued it like a denom. His Spad gained speed, eating up the intervening distance.

It was plain that he intended to ram that black-crossed rudder with his whirling prop, bringing sure death to both at once. The German flyer, staring back over his fairing with eyes that went wide with terror, nosed over farther and farther still, until the Fokker rocketed downward in a screaming, vertical dive.

The white-wheeled plane hit the ground so hard that it flew into a million pieces. It seemed to vanish into thin air, or to bury itself utterly beneath the surface of the earth in the twinkling of an eye.

One instant it existed; the next instant it did not. Bolo curved out flat with the upper branches of the trees whipping his under-carriage. No plane but a Spad could have withstood that brusque pull-out. Even so, the struts groaned, and the wires shrieked tautly.

But the very velocity of the dive, carrying through as momentum, was enough to save him. Before the Fokkers up above had time to grasp what had happened and think of following him, he was humming toward the lines at incredible speed. Given a hundred yards clear start, and a level run, and no German plane on the Front

could catch a Spad. Five minutes, and he was soaring across the river with a half mile to spare.

"His name?" Bolo was saying to the major, some time later. "Damned if I know. He said that Colonel Wharton—whoever he is—would know him as 'Ninety.' That's all he told me. But he had the dope."

"He certainly did. We must get your information back to the engineers as quick as possible, too, so they can get to work."

Bolo grinned crookedly.

"No rush, major. They don't need to worry about figurin' out some scheme to beat that sight. Because, in the first place, Greinstein's dead, and I'm pretty sure from what he told me that his secret died with him. In the second place, I can tip you off to how to out-think that mechanical brain, right now."

"But I thought you said it worked perfectly?"

"It does. Too perfectly. That's why I managed to give that Jerry a lot of free shots at me, and live to tell about it. Listen, major. That device is based on a lot of calculations involving, among other things, the speed of the plane.

"Set to fire at a Spad, say, it allows automatically a certain deflection, which is mathematically correct for a Spad's normal full speed. Well, then, if you alter the speed, all those calculations will be thrown off, won't they? And when they're thrown off, the mechanical sight misses fire.

"All I did was this. I shifted the switch from 'On' to 'L,' meaning that instead of two magnetos firing my motor, only one was operating. You know what that does. The motor doesn't miss, but it loses power and slows down about five hundred or a thousand revs, without spoiling your control.

"What was the result? I was moving perhaps ten miles an hour slower than that sight figured. Therefore all the bullets were aimed just a bit too far ahead of me. Not much, but just enough to miss me clean. Well, that's enough, isn't it? A miss is as good as a mile. And a little Yankee cunning is not only as good as a Boche mechanical brain—it's a damned sight better!"

And once more the major had to allow that Bolo was right.

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EXPLOSION

BUZZARD

A RED FALCON STORY
by ROBERT J. HOGAN



"Ach Himmel, help has come in time," gasped the German. But he had no idea that the rescuing plane was the Red Falcon, that its pilot was Barry Rand, Yank outlaw—and that the two of them were due to go hell-bent on a dynamite sky mission!

BARRY RAND surveyed the low-hanging clouds from the rim rock of flat-topped Saar Mountain. The sun would be setting just about now but there was no evidence of that fact in the west. No blazing sunset, only the slow dimming of light. It would be dark soon. A very light breeze blew the smoke behind him as he took puffs of a cigarette and exhaled. He was humming a tune softly to himself. His favorite.

"Be down to get you in a taxi, honey, hum-hum, hum-hum, hum-hum."

Apparently he didn't have a worry in the world. But he started as Sika, his great black aide, came noiselessly behind him and spoke.

"Not look like good night for flying, master."

"Fact is," Barry said, "it is very rotten."

"We fly tonight, master?" Sika asked.

"I was just trying to figure that out." Then almost instantly he nodded. "Yes, we fly tonight, Sika."

"Master make up his mind in a hurry," said the big black.

Barry shrugged. "Just sorta got a hunch."

Sika waited. "About what, master?"

"Don't know exactly," Barry said. "I'm not naturally superstitious, but there seems to be something drawing me out there in that mess and I don't know what it is."

"But, master, the fog," Sika objected. "Clouds hang down low. We not see lines or anything from here."

"Sure, I know," said Barry. "But maybe it will be okay when we get down."

"We need gas, master," Sika said. "Got plenty bullets."

Barry didn't answer. He was staring out into the dimming gray twilight.

"We'll get gas," he said finally, "but I was just thinking." He smiled a little. "I'd like to try one of our own gas stations this time. Just sorta for fun, Sika."

"Maybe you think it fun to get caught and shot, master," Sika warned.

"I'm not worried so much about that. If the Germans capture you as a spy, they'll line you up and shoot you the next dawn.

"But the cautious Yanks, they're too afraid of killing the wrong man. So there's usually a lot of red tape about being shot on our side."

He glanced at the Red Falcon plane standing nearby under the protecting branches of the trees.

"How is she, Sika, all set to fly?"

"Yes, master, but she low on gas."

"How much have we got?"

"About enough for an hour and a half. Maybe not quite that."

Barry thought a moment. "I think that's enough. I'll put on my flying togs, then we'll go."

Two minutes later, Barry returned from the cabin carrying two sets of helmets and goggles. He handed one to Sika and stepped into the cockpit.

"All right, big boy," he said. "Wind her up."

Several turns of the giant prop caused the Liberty to blast out. Barry let the motor warm while the instrument needles pointed to satisfactory figures. It had grown darker in those minutes of preparation. A blinding cloud of fog drifted over the mountain top, smothered them with gray mist and then passed on.

Barry's hand pushed the throttle ahead and he kicked the rudder, turning the ship to taxi out on the field. His eyes were a little anxious now as he looked about in the gathering darkness. Sika spoke to him through the tube from the rear cockpit:

"Maybe fog too thick, master. Maybe we stay home tonight."

Barry didn't answer for a few seconds. He wasn't so sure of the fog and mist himself, but he shook his head.

"No, I've got a hunch we ought to be out there. Hang on, big boy, here we go."

"Yes, master," came the answer, a bit nervously.

The great Liberty roared. The Red Falcon plane shot ahead and a few seconds later it was alone in the gray-black clouds, without the slightest sign of earth anywhere about them. Barry turned in

a general westerly direction. He let the crimson crate climb higher and higher. He must make sure of a safe altitude.

At 3,000 feet above Saar Mountain he leveled off. That would give him about 5,000 feet above the lower country of western and central France. He dropped the map case in front of him, leaped over maps until he found one showing the area south of Paris. He smiled a little.

"How would you like to see those great training fields at Issodun, Sika? There used to be quite a bunch of fields while I was there, months and months ago. All sort of different and still all hooked together."

"Why we go there, master?" Sika asked. "There be many men there."

Barry nodded. "Of course there will. That's why I picked it. There'll be so many men that, as usual, there'll be a lot of confusion."

"But maybe there be so many men we get caught," Sika said.

"I hardly think so," Barry explained. "Whenever you want to keep under cover, big boy, get in the biggest crowd possible. Get right in the middle of it and usually every one is so interested in everyone else that he won't bother to ask you a lot of fool questions."

"But master, we have to get gas and you tell me I not fight or kill Americans."

"You're damn right I did and do," said Barry. "I don't think we're going to have to fight about this. Not if I can get rid of you somewhere, big boy."

MINUTES passed. They rolled on into a half hour and then an hour. Barry was watching his gas gauge more and more anxiously. It was beginning to jiggle dangerously toward the empty mark. He pushed the stick ahead and the nose dropped.

He stared tensely out, struggling to

catch any glimpse of land that might come through the heavy clouds. But no such sight came to him. He dropped 2,000 feet. The clouds, thick, foreboding and black, still clung about them.

"We ought to see something that looks like earth pretty soon," Barry said.

"In pitch darkness now it be hard to tell from mist," Sika ventured.

"Right," snapped Barry.

He struck up his favorite tune again, whistled "The Dark Town Strutter's Ball." He dropped 500 feet more.

"I think I see a break, Sika. Seems to be getting thin down there. Look—" Sika's voice cut in.

"Master! Master! Lights below!"

The air was getting clearer. Barry Rand didn't have to follow the pointed finger of his black aide to see what he was shouting about. There were flashes of light, blue like those from an electric arc, coming up rather dimly through the bottom of the cloud bank in which they flew.

Barry dropped the nose into a steeper dive. Suddenly the ship broke out into clearer air that was hazed by a light, drizzling rain. They could see the blue flashes plainly now.

"What is it, master?" Sika called.

Barry hesitated to answer. And before he could get near enough to see them distinctly, the flashes stopped.

"They heard us coming down," Sika warned.

Barry shook his head.

"Maybe, but I don't think so."

He was circling a thousand feet above the spot where they had seen those arcing flashes.

"There! More flashes, master!" Sika cried.

Barry could see them as the big black spoke. But they weren't in a hot, bluish flame now. Rather they were orange, tipped with crimson and they were on

either side of a fairly wide area. Furthermore, they were accompanied by the crackle of gunfire which came to the Red Falcon and his aide dimly above the thunderous roar of their motor.

Barry jerked back the stick and zoomed almost up into the clouds again. From that altitude he released a flare. It burst into brilliance and lighted the earth below them. A strange scene was being enacted down there.

"Look!" Barry yelled, "it's a prison camp. A camp with a flock of Heinies penned up in it. See their quarters in the middle and the big yard and the rows of electrified barbed wire around it? Somebody has escaped."

Sika's excited voice cut in there.

"There he goes, master, running north across open field!"

"Yeah, and those guards with their guns going off aren't so very far behind him, either."

The flare was settling, settling. Before long it would burn out. But in its light they saw the running figure. They saw him stare upward, then extend both arms toward the plane as though in supplication. But he didn't stop. He crossed the field, reached a low hedge just as the pursuing guards came upon the other end.

From above Barry and Sika saw the fleeing prisoner turn abruptly to the left and run along behind the hedge, using it as a screen. The guards were going on across the field. They reached the hedge some twenty or thirty seconds after the man they pursued had dodged to the left. They broke through and started on across the next field.

Then suddenly they stopped short. Barry and Sika could see them running about excitedly. At that moment the flare went out and darkness hovered over the ground once more. Then they saw tiny lights like fireflies pricking the gloom, dancing about. Barry was grinning as he stuck

the nose of the plane into the air and climbed again.

"That Heinie has plenty of guts to cut his way through a bunch of highly charged barbed wire and escape," he called back to Sika. "I've never done much to help the Jerries against my own gang, but I'd sure like to give that fellow a boost. A guy like that deserves a break."

He reached a point close to the bottom of the clouds. His hand went to the flare release lever and a moment later the earth was lighted brilliantly once more.

"If we spot him this time," Barry called through the tube, "don't shout too loud, Sika. Your voice might carry to those guards hunting him."

"Yes, master," said Sika softly.

Down, down they plunged. They saw that the men who made up the searching party were spreading in all directions. Barry grinned.

"I guess," he said, "he's given them the slip. Maybe we can find him and give him a lift. I'm curious about this whole business."

He flew in a lower circle to the east in the direction the fleeing prisoner had taken. They passed a woods, a small patch of trees.

"I'll bet he's in there," Barry said.

He climbed a little higher and circled twice.

"Damn that flare," he said. "I wish it would keep going a little longer."

"Master," Sika called softly, "there he is, see him? He comes out of edge of woods."

Barry stared.

"Yes, I see him. Duck, Sika. Duck down in your cockpit. I don't want him to see you."

He roared low in front of the fringe of woods. He pulled back the throttle. The nose of the Liberty died. Then Bar-

ry called in his best German to the man he could see dimly there:

"Hold on, I'm going to land and pick you up."

THE prisoner had a good lead, but his pursuers would find him soon now that the plane had revealed his whereabouts. As Barry circled and came in to land he called through the tube to Sika:

"Listen, big boy. I hate to do this, but you gotta get out for a while. Slip out before this bird sees you. I got an idea for getting some gas at Issodon. I know this prison camp and Issodon isn't far off. But if you're along they'll spot me instantly. With this Heinie, maybe I can get away with it."

"You mean, master, you land at Issodon with this German in my place?"

"Right," said Barry. "Now be a good guy and hop out and don't ask any more questions. Make a big circle to the west and south and back again to this field. Be here in about twenty minutes. I'll be back to pick you up then."

"Yes, master," said Sika obediently.

The flare flickered and died, but Barry had his direction well in mind. He slipped over the eastern border of the little field, and landed in the darkness. Wheels touched and rolled. He felt the fuselage shudder a little. That was Sika climbing out.

He heard a hastily whispered, "Good-bye, master. You not forget Sika." Then his black aide was gone in the darkness.

A few seconds later he heard the swift footsteps of someone running and next a panting voice in German:

"*Gott* be praised. Help has come in time. Who are you?"

"Never mind that," Barry replied in German. "Hurry, climb in before it's too late."

The man was climbing with all possible haste into the back cockpit. There

was a thunderous roar as the Red Falcon plane leaped down the field and once more took the air.

Barry turned toward the field where the group of guards had last been seen. Blackness all about them. But now shafts of light flashed upward and there came the dim *crack! crack! crack!* of rifle fire above the drone of the Liberty. Tongues of flame, tiny pencil points in yellow and red, were spitting up at them.

"*Ach*, my pursuers," said Barry's passenger. "They are no doubt very angry."

"*Ja*," said Barry. "We fooled them."

"And now we go instantly back to Germany?" came the inquiry from behind.

"We do that very shortly," Barry assured him. "Just as soon as we can replenish our gasoline supply."

"*Himmel*, you would stop on this side of the lines for gas?"

"Got to," said Barry.

"But we will be caught and I will be made a prisoner all over again," said the man.

"Not if my stunt works," said Barry. "I speak good English. I believe I can tell them a story at Issodon that they will believe." He climbed higher as he talked. "The prison camp should be below us here and Issodon?"

"*Ja, ja*," said the other. "It is only four or five kilometers to the south. I have seen men in training fly over while I was in camp."

"Right," said Barry. "In another couple of minutes I'll drop another flare."

"But this plane you fly," objected the man behind him. "They will see the black crosses and they will—"

"You're wrong, *mein Freund*," he cut in. "This plane I fly has no markings of any kind—no crosses and no circles, like some of the training planes that are used far behind the lines. You'll just sit still in your cockpit and let me do the talking, *verstehen sie?*"

"Ja, ja, I will sit still, but—"
"I'll see to it," said Barry.

He released a flare that flooded the earth below, revealing the great expanse of fields that comprised the training depot of hundreds of Yank pilots. Issodon was just ahead. He cut the gun. The Liberty motor died. Then he was gliding down in the light of the flare to land. Men came running out to the deadline as he taxied up. Some carried flashlights. They looked curiously at the plane and the two men inside.

"I want to see your commanding officer at once," Barry said. "Tell him it's very important."

Two men left to find him. The others hovered about. Barry eyed them a little coldly.

"I think," he said, "it would be well for you birds to be out of sight when the C. O. comes. I have some very private things to talk over with him."

Grudgingly the crowd broke up and men moved to a respectful distance, but continued to watch. Five minutes elapsed. Then a motorcycle pulled up. The flare had long since gone out and it was dark once more. A figure climbed out of the sidecar and strode to the edge of the cockpit.

"I am Major Sparks. Who are you and what do you want?"

"Come closer so I can tell you, major," Barry requested. "I must whisper. I am on a special mission tonight. I have a spy in the rear cockpit whom I must drop over the lines. But, unfortunately, when we left our field our tanks were not full. The fog is very bad over our field so we were forced to land here to refuel. If you will see to it at once, major, we will be eternally grateful to you."

"Of course," said Major Sparks. He raised his voice. "Hey, you on the gas crew, get out the trucks and refuel this plane immediately."

After a moment's scrutiny of Barry and the man in German uniform, the light of Major Sparks' flash went out. Barry sat with a half grin on his face as he heard the truck pull up before the Red Falcon plane. Then gas was gurgling into the tank. It seemed to take a long time to fill it.

"You've a large capacity for gasoline," Major Sparks ventured.

"Yes," said Barry. "The plane was specially built for this work. There's no markings on it of any kind. But isn't that the way this war goes, major? They build this plane with extra large tanks. Then put a dumb mechanic on it who forgets to fill them."

"Right," snapped Major Sparks. "It's those things that drive the commanding officers crazy. Yet some of these birds think we have a snap of it."

"Isn't it the truth?" Barry grinned in the darkness.

Finally the tank was filled. The cap was replaced.

"I think you're all set," said the major. "Here, one of you men throw the prop."

Four men strung out, hand in hand, before the great propeller in the darkness.

"Contact!" yelled Barry.

The Liberty sputtered, roared and then idled.

"Good luck to you," said the major.

"Thanks," Barry answered. "We'll probably need it."

BARRY roared down the field into the wind and two seconds later he was flying again. Climbing higher and higher, he headed for the field where he had left Sika. Surprised to see his altimeter go up to 3,000 feet, he kept on for more altitude instead of leveling off.

"Ach, we are in luck, *mein Freund*," he said. "The storm clouds are lifting."

Did you notice back there at Issodon the rain has stopped?"

"Ja," answered the other. "Look. Up there is a little light in the sky. The clouds already are breaking away. *Nicht wahr?*"

"*Jawohl,*" replied Barry. "*Das ist gut.*"

"*Ach du lieber,* that was a clever trick you played on the *Amerikaner* back at Issodon field. How did you do it?"

Barry's muscles tightened for a split second.

"How do you know it was a good trick? Do you speak English?"

"*Ach, nein.* And besides I couldn't hear you, anyway. But would it not be very clever for any German to come down on a field with his plane and get gasoline in his tank with so little trouble?"

Barry relaxed.

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

At 4,500 he ran into clouds, but an instant later came quickly out of them. He was high above the field where he had dropped Sika. He pulled the release lever and another flare dropped out. Far down they could see the earth. Then an explosive cry from the back seat.

"*Gott im Himmel! Wast ist!* Why do you drop a flare to show the enemy where we are? *Ach,* you are going down now. I thought we were going back to Germany."

"Not so fast, *mein Freund,*" Barry said. "I have to make one more landing before we go."

"But I do not see what is the reason for another landing."

"Don't forget," Barry said, "I'm running this show. I just saved you from those guards who were chasing you. That ought to be enough to give you some confidence in me. *Nicht wahr?*"

"*Jawohl,* but—"

"Don't bother to say it, we're going to land anyway."

As Barry spoke he was diving down past the little, glowing parachute flare.

Diving down for that little field where he had landed once before that night. As he flew he drew the automatic from his holster. Keeping his head turned sideways, he watched out of the tail of his eye the man behind. The occupant of the rear cockpit must have noticed his move for he made no more objections.

In the light of the flare Barry saw a great figure moving and waving at the edge of the field. He kicked over on one wing and slipped down for a landing. As he did so Sika came running across the field toward him.

"Master, you not forget Sika," he said.

At this, an explosive voice came from the back cockpit, this time in English.

"Hey, what goes on here?"

Barry whirled and stared at him in the light of the flare that was still drifting down. The man was half out of the cockpit. Sika grabbed him just before he had a chance to leap out.

"You stay until my master tell you to go," Sika said.

Barry glared at the German, then spoke in English.

"How come you talked like a Heinie up to now and all of a sudden you start spouting perfectly good Brooklyn English?"

The man was staring from Sika to Barry and back again.

"Oh, now I get it," he snapped. "You're the Red Falcon. I didn't recognize you without your black man here. Well, what are you going to do with me now?"

"Nothing very serious," Barry said, "unless you won't talk. But we got to get out of here right now. Hang on to him, Sika. We're going back home and talk this thing over. And you better keep your hand over his eyes when we get close to home so he won't see where we have our hideout."

The Red Falcon plane had been shuddering as the black had climbed into the

cockpit. Now he was seated with the German garbed stranger on his lap.

"Yes, master," he answered.

"Wait a minute!" exploded the other. "There isn't time for a lot of monkey business and talking. I've got to—"

Suddenly he fell silent. The crackle of rifle fire had sounded from the other end of the field. One bullet pinged past and two thudded into the wing covering. The Red Falcon plane shot ahead. It rumbled, grew slowly light and then lifted sluggishly with its great load.

Barry shouted through the tube as they turned toward the Vosges Mountains and home.

"Hello, Sika?"

"Yes, master," answered the big black.

"Put our friend on the other end of the tube. I want to talk to him."

"Yes, master."

Then a moment later Barry was saying:

"Just what was that you started to say when I interrupted you?"

"Nothing," said the man.

"Okay," said Barry. "Keep it to yourself if you want to. You'll talk before long or you won't eat."

NO ONE spoke for the next 45 minutes. Barry Rand flew that Red Falcon plane wide open, straight for his aerie on flat-topped Saar Mountain. The storm clouds had cleared and the fog was gone. There was a half moon out to light their way into the mountains. A few minutes before they landed Barry called back:

"Better cover up his eyes now."

"His eyes covered, master," Sika assured him.

"Okay, big boy. Here we go."

With the moon to light the way, Barry swung low over the flat top of Saar Mountain. He turned into the wind and dropped the plane lightly on the field, taxied under the trees and stopped.

"Okay, Sika," he said. "Now I guess you can relieve the blinders from our friend's eyes and help him to the ground."

The man in the German uniform glared at him in the light of the moon as he got out.

"Listen," he snapped, "you can't do this. The lives of thousands of Americans, maybe some of them your friends, are at stake."

"Then," said Barry, "the faster you start telling us everything, the greater chance they will have of coming out whole. Let's go in the cabin and build a fire. That was a pretty clammy ride in the fog."

"Yes, master," said Sika and trotted off.

The two sat down before the fireplace and a moment later flames licked up inside and sent a cheery glow about the interior of the cabin. Barry studied the man in the German uniform for a moment.

"Just why," he asked, "did you stop talking and refuse to go on when I picked up Sika?"

"Well, of course," the other said, "you must admit some strange things have been going on tonight. You saw me break out of a German prison camp, picked me up as one whom you thought was an escaped prisoner, and gave me the idea that you were flying back across the lines.

"I think it was the sudden realization that you were the Red Falcon that stopped me more than anything else. You see, we've heard a lot of stories about you. Some of them aren't any too complimentary. Understand me, I'm not saying they are true. You know how things get about."

"Yes," Barry nodded bitterly.

Barry shifted in his chair. The other passed him a pack of cigarettes and Barry took one. He struck a match and lighted both.

"Look here," Barry said. "We may as well understand each other from the beginning. My name is Barry Rand and I've never done anything that any other true, red-blooded American wouldn't do under the circumstances.

"When I picked you up tonight I did think you were a German, fleeing a prison camp. I dropped Sika so that I wouldn't be recognized as the Red Falcon so readily. I picked you up for two reasons. I can't tell you how much I admired your nerve in cutting your way out of that electrified barbed wire as you did.

"You see, we were coming out of the fog looking for the ground when those flashes of light attracted our attention. I said to myself that any man, Heinie or Yank, who had guts enough to make the break you did to get free deserved to be saved.

"Then I figured I'd pose as a fellow German. Of course, in this teddy bear outfit of mine it's pretty hard to tell which side of the lines a pilot is fighting for, if he hasn't any markings of identification on his ship.

"I figured as a comrade German you might confide in me some secrets that would help my side of the lines. That was really the important reason for trying to help you get away."

Barry settled back in his chair.

"I think," he said, "I've been quite frank with you. I believe it's your turn. First, would you mind telling me your name?"

The man smiled.

"I am quite satisfied with your explanation," he said. "The truth is, I have no name in the war. I am an Intelligence officer and as such I am known as S-17."

"Huh?" Barry showed surprise.

S-17 laughed.

"I thought you'd get a kick out of that," he said. "Here's the dope. This afternoon a bunch of German prisoners were

rushed from the Front where they were captured to the prison camp here near Issodun. I joined them dressed as a German.

"We're expecting a drive sometime in the next few days in the Versette sector. These prisoners came from one end of that. Intelligence decided it would be best to conceal my identity even from the guards.

"You see, for some time we suspected these prisoners were working a signal system between their camp and the coast. It's relayed by lights or in such a way that it reaches all the way across France to a submarine somewhere in the English Channel. We are practically positive of this, but as yet we haven't been able to put a stop to it.

"That was why it was necessary for me to escape as a regular prisoner and run my chances of getting free. Of course, I was given the added privilege of smuggling in insulated wire cutters and naturally, that did the trick.

"But if the Germans in the prison camp suspected that I, as a spy, had gained the information I have, they would have immediately relayed the messages to the submarine telling their Brass Hats to change their plans."

Barry frowned.

"Yes," he said, "that's all very well. That's a good story, S-17, but there's a hitch in it. Why were you so concerned when you found I wasn't going back to Germany?"

"It does look a bit fishy, doesn't it?" S-17 admitted. "But here was my plan. If a Boche pilot took me into Germany that would be a way of getting there without suspicion."

"But how would you get word to our own troops about what you had learned?" Barry demanded.

The smile on S-17's face broadened.

"That would be a very simple trick,"

he said. "I have here in my clothing a thin messenger streamer and also pencil and paper. In fact, I had already started to write a message when you decided to land and pick up your black aide here. That's one reason why it gave me such a start. I hadn't figured on that."

"Oh, I get it," Barry said. "Pretty simple of me not to guess it before. You were going to write a note telling all that you had learned in the prison camp and then drop it into the Yank trenches as we went over the lines. Right?"

"Perfectly," nodded S-17.

"IT LOOKS," Barry chuckled, "as though we all had pretty much of a surprise party. But about this information you learned." His face suddenly clouded with uncertainty. "I hope you're ready to spill it now."

"I have complete confidence in you," S-17 said, "if that's what you mean. And having that confidence, I am prepared to tell you what I have learned. In fact, I believe you can be a considerable help to me."

"Good," nodded Barry. "Now we're getting some place. Will you begin, S-17?"

"Yes," nodded the agent. "As I told you before, we have expected a drive somewhere along the Versette sector. But I learned something else that's even more important.

"They are going to make the drive, all right, and they are going to make it at dawn. That isn't so important because we've been preparing for it for some time. However, here's the thing that is of great importance.

"There is a hill with a gradual slope from the south. It ends in a rocky bluff facing the north, overlooking the plain where the Germans will come in this drive.

"Here's what the Germans are terribly

afraid of. With the aid of bombs to blast out the reinforcements from the top of that hill the Yanks can storm up it easily and take possession. Our Yank generals have thought of that, but they haven't figured on the bombers to help them out.

"And I learned from the Germans that their artillery is entrenched so deeply on top of that bluff, which is known as hill 63, that our guns, outside of a possible howitzer battery, can't do more than just throw dirt in their faces.

"We've got to get the bombers over them in order to drop bombs down on them effectively. After that there'll be nothing to it. If this takes place just before dawn, the Yanks can be firmly entrenched and with their own artillery and machine guns ready to hurl back the drive of the enemy at dawn. Do I make myself clear?"

"Do you?" Barry shouted. "I'll say so." He was already on his feet.

"Where are you going?" S-17 demanded.

"Where would I be going?" Barry flung back. "Over to the German side of the lines to tell them to lay off? Don't be foolish. We're going to the nearest airdrome. It will be dawn before we know it. We've got to work fast."

S-17 was standing, too.

"Excellent. I know the airdrome we should head for. It isn't the nearest one, but there's a field of big bombers pretty well south of the Versette sector. We'll go there first and get those started before dawn. Then I'll notify the Yanks to follow them up."

"Swell," said Barry. All three turned to the door. "Hurry, Sika. Wind her up," Barry called as they ran toward the plane.

He leaped to the cockpit. S-17 climbed in behind. The motor roared. The moon had settled low so it was almost pitch

dark, as the Red Falcon plane rumbled into the air. Barry called through the tube as he climbed and headed west.

"Sika? Let me talk to S-17."

"Yes, master."

"What squadron is that? The 181st bombers?" he asked.

"Right," said S-17, "you've got it."

Barry did have it on the map before him in the dim light of his instrument board lamp and he was heading for it as fast as the Liberty motor would hurl him through the air. Minutes sped by. Twice Barry turned and stared into the black eastern sky.

"I hope," he said to himself, "we get this job done before dawn. It comes earlier this time of year."

The Red Falcon plane was traveling at top speed, and it was faster than any other plane on the Front. But it seemed to the tensely nerved Barry Rand that they were little more than standing still. At last they romped down on the field of the 181st bombers. He made out dimly the gigantic hangars that housed the great Handley-Page lumber wagons.

It was pitch dark, the darkest hour of the night. The hour before dawn. He circled the field to make sure, waited for a gasoline trench to flare up at a far corner of the field as men below recognized the Liberty motor's bark. Then he came down to a swift landing and taxied to the deadline. Mechanics and a ground officer came running out.

"I want to see your commanding officer at once," Barry said.

And at the same time S-17 said, "I want immediate transportation to the Front and divisional headquarters there."

The kiwi officer studied them in the light of his electric torch. He blinked twice at the German uniform of S-17.

"Don't stand there like a dummy!" the Intelligence officer shouted. "I told you I wanted transportation immediately and

my friend wants your commanding officer."

"Yes, but," began the kiwi.

"Damn it! You're not supposed to think," snapped S-17. "Not when your superiors tell you what to do. Get going!"

"Y—yes, sir," obeyed the kiwi. He turned abruptly and vanished into the gloom.

"Hell!" barked S-17. "I suppose I'll have to find transportation for myself."

"I guess that Heinie uniform you've got on has him stumped," Barry grinned.

S-17 then vanished in the darkness. A few minutes later the roar of a car starting came to his ears. And about the same time a motorcycle sputtered and screamed to a stop beside the Red Falcon plane.

"What the devil goes on here?" a commanding voice roared. "One of my lieutenants tells me the Red Falcon just landed in his plane with a German aboard."

Barry nodded.

"That's right," he said, "except for the German part of it. Your lieutenant shouldn't jump to conclusions. Remember, all those who wear German uniforms at times aren't Germans. This happened to be S-17 of the Intelligence.

"He has some damned important information. He's just left in a car for divisional headquarters in this sector. He left me here to tell you to get the bombers started at once."

The captain in charge of the field glared at Barry Rand.

"So I'm to send out a flock of bombers on the say-so of a man who's a fugitive from his own country? A deserter from his own army? Is that it?"

"You wouldn't have to take my word for it," Barry snapped, "if it wasn't for the fact that S-17 was in such a hurry. The German artillery placements on hill

63 have got to be blown up. They can only be reached by airplane bombs. They're down to deep.

"As soon as they are out of the way our troops will be ordered to storm up, take the hill and place their guns. All this must happen before dawn, it is—"

Barry half turned and stared. There were very faint streaks in the east now.

"Hells bells!" he exploded. "It will be dawn before I get through arguing with you."

"There will be a million dawns before I'll send my bombers out on the word of a renegade like you," the captain flamed.

AS HE finished speaking Barry saw him shift the light from his right to his left hand. Then he saw that right hand move downward significantly. Barry Rand moved with lightning speed. His foot came up and kicked the light out of the captain's hand. And as it fell he jerked his own gun from its holster, leveled with the captain.

"All right, you lousy example of an American officer," he cracked. "One false move out of you and I'll drill you with pleasure."

With his eyes still on the officer who was reaching for sky now, Barry reached down and recovered the flashlight. He straightened.

"Now," he said, "turn around and show me where the bombs are kept. If you won't send over bombers we'll take them over ourselves. And, Sika, you climb in the back cockpit and if anyone so much as lays a hand on this ship, you know what to do with them."

"Yes, master," said the giant black.

"Now, about face, forward march, Captain," Barry snapped.

And the captain obeyed without a word. There was no trickery from the captain. He marched ahead of Barry into the near-

est hangar. Two mechanics were working on a plane in a dim light.

"Get out six light bombs," the captain ordered. "Put them where I tell you to."

The men obeyed. Each carried three, ahead of the captain. Barry walked behind him, his automatic against his back. They reached the ship.

"Now put them in the racks," Barry commanded.

They obeyed.

"You just stand off to the side, Captain. And you birds," he nodded to the two mechanics, "wing her up."

They did. The Liberty responded with a roar.

"Watch him, Sika," Barry called over his shoulder. "Keep your guns on him and don't let him make a false move."

He spun the Red Falcon plane on its front wheels, covering the sputtering captain with dust. Then they were roaring across the field. Slowly, grudgingly, the Red Falcon plane lifted with its heavy load.

"Master, look. Almost daylight."

Barry glanced to the right.

"Right," he said. "Why couldn't that squadron commander have been a regular guy? Most of them are in the air service."

Barry pushed on the throttle again and again to make sure it was wide open. Would they never reach the crest of hill 63? It seemed that hours passed before they could see it, but actually it was only a very few minutes. Barry climbed to a thousand feet and held that altitude. Once, twice he heard the crackle of gun-fire from behind the Yank lines.

"Some poor damn fools got to be shooting at something or they aren't happy."

But there were no shots fired when he dropped altitude and flew low over the Front lines of the Yank forces and just south of hill 63. There seemed to

be nervous tension in the air. A nervous tension that broke suddenly at sight of that crimson plane bearing no identification markings. And Barry Rand was flying low enough so that the men in the trenches could see the bombs in their racks. He couldn't hear their shouts, but he could see them waving frantically.

Then a deafening rattle burst forth. A rattle accompanied by the drumming of steel on wing and fuselage covering. The machine guns along the breastworks of hill 63 had stuttered into action. But Barry had sensed what was coming an instant before that deadly fire broke out.

The Red Falcon plane began to buck and leap like a thing possessed, throwing the gunners off their aim. He swerved in a tight vertical to the right along the hill. He swerved back again in 180 degree turn. Now he was thundering over the crest of the hill. He could look down and see the gun placements. He pulled the bomb release levers twice.

Blam! Blam!

The Red Falcon plane shot up, pushed high in the air by the explosion. Instantly Barry was hurling over in a steep chandelle, racing back at those gun placements. He saw two deep holes there and three disabled guns at the other end. Again he pulled his bomb levers.

Blam!

BARRY hurled the crimson plane over on one ear. Fokkers had charged out of the north. He crouched over his stick and took aim. Pressed his triggers.

White tracers fluffed out. Another Fokker went down. He straightened his course, tramped on his triggers again and kicked the rudder viciously, spraying the remaining five Fokkers with his lead. They veered away to dodge his fire and as they turned Barry banked over and screamed down for the third time on the enemy gun placements on hill 63.

Tac-tac-tac! Tac-tac-tac! Tac-tac-tac!

Sika was raving from the side of his twin Lewis guns. Then Barry was romping down over the three remaining guncrews in their deep entrenchments. He pulled the bomb release, let go his two remaining eggs.

He whirled and stared back over the tail. The whole hilltop was gutted now except for two or three machine-gun nests. Sika was firing behind, holding back the Fokkers as Barry climbed. He swung to look the other way and down. Yanks were storming out of their trenches in the first of those three machine gun nests.

Barry whipped over, opened his guns as he dived and poured lead and death into those three nests. Then he zoomed again, high out of reach of the Fokkers as they tried desperately to follow him.

Barry saw Yanks of the infantry storming up that hill. Saw them take possession. And a moment later guns were being moved up in their wake. Artillery guns that had been waiting under camouflage. He stared north of the hill. The German drive was starting. He saw Boches by the hundreds running across that plain to back up the advance of the men in the Front line trenches. The advance that wasn't doing so well.

Then Yank guns were going into action along the northern crest of hill 63 and the attacking Germans began to fall before that deadly barrage.

Then Barry Rand turned the Red Falcon plane back toward the rising sun.

"Well, I guess that's that," he said through the tube to Sika.

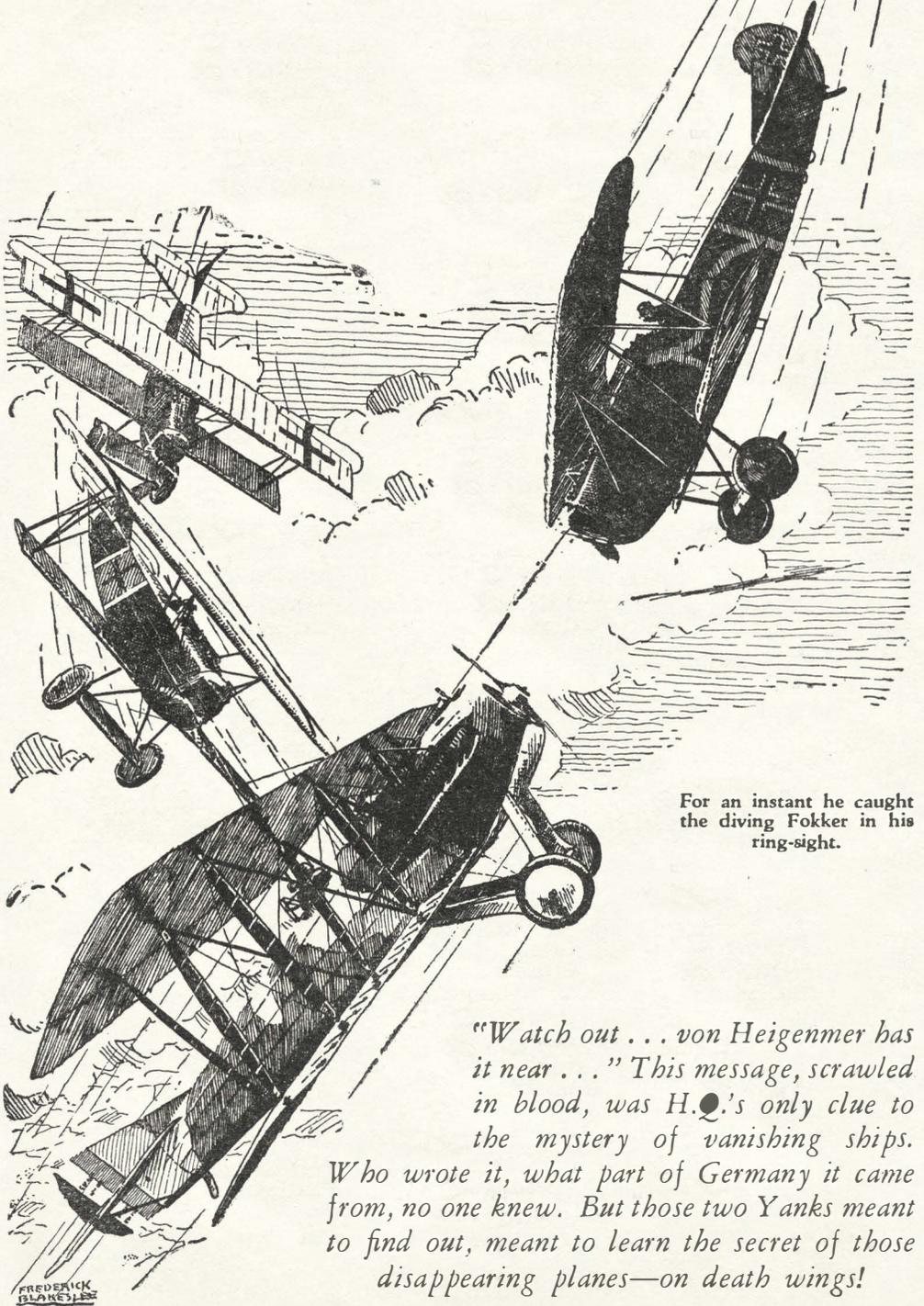
"Yes, master," came back the reply. "But why you not wait to see the full victory?"

Barry shook his head.

"Too much blood," he said. "I want to get back while I still have an appetite for breakfast."

The Shanghaied Patrol

by C. M. MILLER



For an instant he caught the diving Fokker in his ring-sight.

"Watch out . . . von Heigenmer has it near . . ." This message, scrawled in blood, was H. Q.'s only clue to the mystery of vanishing ships. Who wrote it, what part of Germany it came from, no one knew. But those two Yanks meant to find out, meant to learn the secret of those disappearing planes—on death wings!

FREDERICK BLANKENLEE

IT WAS scarcely dawn when the two grim-faced, hastily-summoned men met in the wide corridor in American H.Q. at Arras. For a tense moment they stood glaring into each others eyes with mixed expressions of anger and disgust.

They were captains—both of them. Captain Ward Hale—neat, slim, tidy to the point of absolute perfection; and Tom Slade—big, husky, almost awkward and extremely careless about his clothes.

These two men were like oil and water. They just wouldn't mix, and their enmity was notorious throughout that sector of the Front.

"Slade," Ward Hale said evenly. "I don't know what brings you here at this time of the morning, but God knows I hope it wasn't because General Drake sent for you."

Slade's eyes glittered.

"Drake sent for me," he growled. "But if that warty-faced general thinks I'm goin' to work with you on a case, he's got another think coming. I wouldn't be caught in a graveyard with you even if some brass hat did think he could send me there."

A door at Hale's left popped open suddenly and the "warty-faced general" stood there glaring at them out of fire-filled eyes.

"You'll do just as you're told, Captain Slade," he rasped. "Even if some warty-faced general does tell you. And I hope you heard that too, Captain Hale. Now get inside here both of you. I've no time to fool around with your damn scrapping. Get in here—quick."

Saluting, they walked quietly into the roomy office. General Drake faced them furiously.

"Just because one of you looks like a clothes model and the other looks like a ragbag is no reason why you two should be continuously scrapping. Cut it out!"

The two captains were stiff-backed, their eyes glinting and hard. It was plain it would take more than a general's order to change their minds about each other.

The general stepped quickly to his desk and picked up a crumpled flimsy. He faced them gravely.

"I sent for you two men for a very serious reason. One that I can scarcely believe myself." He held out the paper. "Captain Hale, read it out loud—if it isn't too badly smeared."

Hale took the flimsy, held it in front of him, staring at it with eyes that slowly widened with a mixed look of horror and surprise.

"It's written in blood!" he gasped. "The stuff has caked on it. It's—"

Captain Slade shifted his feet uneasily.

General Drake rasped hoarsely. "Yes—blood. The blood of the man who wrote it. Read it."

Hale read slowly—jerkily—aloud.

"Watch out—von Heigenmer has it near—"

The scrawl ended as if a man's dead hand had smeared across the paper. As if he had tried to write the warning with his last breath.

Hale looked up. His black eyes seemed like holes burned in a white blanket.

"What—is it? What—does it mean?" Slade stammered.

"That's the point," the general said gravely. "That's why I sent for you two. Our planes have been disappearing mysteriously. Flying into the air—and not coming down again, even on our own side of the lines."

"Impossible!" Hale gasped. "The law of gravity—"

Slade cut in. "I've heard rumors. Something about two French ships."

General Drake nodded. "Right. Two French ships from the 104th flew straight up into the clouds. They never came down. The men on that field refuse to

take to the air any more. Fifteen of our own have gone the same way."

He paused, wiped his face with an already perspiration-wet handkerchief. It was plain that the general's nerves were on ragged edge. He pounded the desk with his fist. "I tell you two it's got to stop!" he exclaimed. "It's got to stop! If this keeps up we won't be able to get a ship in the air."

"Tell us the rest of it," Hale said slowly.

The general got hold of himself, took a cigar from a box on his desk, and rolled it between his fingers. It crumbled under the nervous pressure he put on it.

"If it had been only one or two ships I wouldn't think so much of it. I'd think that they were being shot down back of the German lines. But seventeen, all told, in the last week! Seventeen of them!"

He dropped the ragged cigar, picked up another.

"Seventeen could be accounted for that way too," he went on a bit jerkily. "But I ordered five of them up myself. And I gave them rigid orders, not under any circumstances, to cross the lines."

He wiped the handkerchief across his face again. "They—they didn't come down. None of them. They just flew up to the clouds and disappeared. I had men watching them with glasses."

"In broad daylight?" Slade asked.

The general's head bobbed. "In broad daylight," he repeated. "Then we sent in word to our G-2 men to get busy in Germany, and find out if they had anything to do with it—some new machine or something."

He waved a hand toward the blood-smearred paper Hale was holding.

"That came through by carrier pigeon, about an hour ago. It doesn't tell us much," he finished lamely— "except about von Heigenmer. He's some sort of a German scientist. Half crazy, but

shrewd as hell, like some crazy men."

"And none of those planes came down?" Hale asked.

"Didn't I tell you none of 'em did?" The general snapped testily.

"Nor their pilots?" Slade put in. "They might have jumped."

The general shook his head. "Nothing," he said firmly. "They just disappeared."

HE HAD mangled the second cigar into a frayed ruin. He threw it down, grabbed another.

"We've a last chance at finding out about this thing," he went on. "You two men—I picked you, Hale, because you are a crackerjack pilot. I picked you, Slade, because you are an ace observer."

His eyes darted from one man's face to the other. He went on, deliberately, distinctly.

"I have a brand-new, two-seated Spad fighter ready for you to use. I believe that two men in one ship might be able to succeed where one would—would—" he hesitated, "—might not come back. So far all the ships taken have been single seaters."

The two captains said nothing. They merely stared. A big wart on the general's left cheek twitched.

Hale looked at Slade. Slade looked at Hale. The whole thing was unbelievable. Ships flying straight up and not coming down! But neither man flinched. Instead, there was a light of almost eagerness in their eyes.

They nodded.

The general said gravely. "Good! Good! I'm trusting this in your hands. But for God's sake quit your fighting each other—if you can." Then his eyes hardened.

"And that 'warty-faced general' business—I'll take care of that when you get

back—if you do. I'm not a man that likes to be insulted."

Both Slade and Hale flushed. But there was anger in that flush, not shame, nor fear.

"When do you want us to go?" Hale clipped. "Although I would much rather have someone, at least partly clean, in the pit behind me."

Slade roared. "And I'd a damn sight rather have a man pilot than a tailor's dummy."

"Cut it!" General Drake snapped; his voice crackling with authority. "Cut it. Get out now. Go at once. This is a cloudy morning. Try it now. Your ship is ready to go. It's in a hangar back of this building. And if I hear any more of this—this confounded scrapping—so help me God—"

He choked on his fury. "Get out!" he snorted. "And bring me back a report instantly you get it. And get it, too."

He waved both hands toward the door as if he were shooing a chicken in front of him.

At the door Hale turned.

"You've no idea where that note came from, have you?" he asked.

The general shook his head. "Absolutely none," he said. "The man who wrote it was one of our agents, of course. But we don't know which one. It looks like he felt himself going and couldn't even finish its writing. You saw it. There was no signature."

The two captains eyed the trim lines of the two-seated Spad with admiration. The ship was a gleaming, silver-colored beauty with the latest guns.

They were ready to go. The ship was warming.

Captain Hale glanced distastefully toward Tom Slade's oil-spattered leather coat. His helmet was just as greasy as the coat. Only his goggle glasses were

spotlessly clean. But in this business a man had to have good vision.

Dirty goggles could mean death.

Hale was trim, neat. His leather coat was spotless, and his helmet brand-new.

"Well," he said finally. "What do you think of that ship?"

Tom Slade spat.

"I think it would be a damn fine crate—if it had a pilot," he said evenly.

Hale spun on the toes of his well-polished boots.

"Why you big greasy lummox, I can take that ship into places that would make you faint. And here's one of them. Get in there and I'll show you."

Slade climbed in.

"Get going, sonny. And mind you don't get the crease out of your pants."

Hale climbed in. The motor drowned out his answer. He waved the chocks away and sent the ship down the field like a silvery bullet. It lifted like a gull and pointed up toward the thick bank of clouds overhead.

Hale called through the voice tube.

"Those guns of yours loaded?"

"You watch out for your own, I'll look out for these," Slade snapped.

But Hale could detect a faint edge on Slade's voice, and he knew that his voice was very much the same. This thing of not coming down again—

"Well, don't lean against 'em," he growled. "You'll clog 'em with grease off that coat of yours."

For answer Slade tripped both guns. They beat at his cowl with a chattering vibration as he kept the trips down until almost a full pan had run through each of them.

Ward Hale was watching those clouds overhead. He nosed the Spad down sharply to see if he could go down. Those other ships hadn't been able to.

Then he heard Slade's muffled voice shouting curses. He twisted around, look-

ing back. Both Slade's guns had jammed.

"You damn fool!" Hale snapped. "Haven't you learned yet to fire in bursts to keep your guns from jamming. We may need those any minute now. Those clouds are close."

Slade was jerking at the cocking handles of both the Lewis', trying to get the split cartridge cases out of them.

Hale started to nose into a shallow dive again. His eyes were on the clouds overhead, trying to penetrate those thick rolling banks of fog.

WITHOUT taking his eyes off the clouds he shoved the stick forward.

The slipstream pushed against the horizontal elevator trying to shove the stick back. Hale jabbed his arms forward hard. The stick shoved back, but he got it forward enough for the shallow dive.

But the Spad didn't dive! Its nose stayed level—and with the twitching stick held forward!

"Slade!" he gasped. "Quick, shove forward on that dual stick back there. Hurry."

Slade whirled away from the jammed guns. "Why?"

"Do it quick!" Hale shouted. "I've got my stick forward. The ship won't dive—it's going up—closer to those clouds. Quick!"

He heard Slade's breath panting through the voice tube, felt the Spad sway as the big man grabbed his stick and rammed it into the socket.

His own stick jiggled and gradually eased forward as they both strained against the rudder. But the ship's nose stayed level—and it kept edging toward the clouds. Going up!

Hale shot a quick glance over his shoulder at the tail section. The horizontal rudder was pointing down. By all the laws of reason they should be nose down, diving.

But they were level, and were rising!

"No use," he snapped. "Something—something has got us. We're going up. Quick, write a note, drop it. Wing is watching us through glasses. Tell them what's happening. Hurry while you can."

The stick pressure on Hale's arms doubled as Slade let loose. He could hear the big man's muffled voice as he bit off nervous curses, and wrote at the same time.

Hale's heart was pounding in his ears like the Hiss in the Spad's nose. His throat felt dry and raw, and his whole body seemed to twitch with nervous, uncontrollable jerks.

If they could only see what they were after!

A paper fluttered away in the slipstream; Slade's note, going down. Now the big fellow was staring wide-eyed at the rolling fog overhead.

He could almost reach up and touch it with his fingers. And it held—what?

He swallowed so loudly that Hale heard it through the voice tube. The clouds closed around them. Damp, swirling fingers of mist that chilled their bones and fogged their goggles, blinding them.

"What—what do you suppose it is?" Slade gasped.

Hale was snarling now. It completely changed the expression of his face, made him look like a freshly barbered tiger.

"I don't know," he snapped. "Haven't the least idea. But we'll find out before we're through with it."

Slade spun to his guns.

"I'm clearing this jam, then I'll shoot hell out of the clouds around here. We'll see if we can hit anything."

He bent over the guns, swiped his hand across his goggles, and wiping the fog off, set to work to clear the jam.

Hale touched his trips. The Vickers blazed fiery bursts into the clouds ahead,

but he couldn't sight them. He could only shoot straight ahead.

He shoved his face around the wind break and the slap of air almost whipped his head off his shoulders. They were going somewhere—fast.

He wet his lips, swallowed. Then his eyes lighted with sudden hope.

"I'll try it," he snapped.

His hand jerked to the switch, clicked it off. The Hisso's roar chopped off with a sucking cough, but the prop kept spinning as air streamed through it.

A drop of cold perspiration trickled down his cheek. He pushed up his goggles and waited, holding his breath. Would the dead motor drag them down?

Ten seconds. Thirty, forty. A minute. They kept going. Flying, with a dead motor, everything around them gray swirling banks of fog. He couldn't even see his wing-tips.

He wiped the fog off the altimeter. It read 10400. Then as he watched it went down to 10300—10200.

"We're going down!" he yelled. "Slade, we're dropping. These clouds began at 9700. We're 10,000 now!"

The other cursed. "These damn guns. If they were clear I'd like to use them on—it—something."

"Slade!" Hale yelled. "The clouds are getting thin. We're breaking through."

The big man leaned far over his coaming, staring down. Hale had dropped the controls, was looking down trying to pierce the thinning fog.

THEY broke through. The clouds were scarcely three feet above their heads. Their motor was dead. They hung there. Steady. Still. In a death-like silence.

Hale's arm stabbed out, pointing down, far down at a tiny patch down there.

"That's Lileden," he rasped. "We're about thirty-five miles back of the German lines, just hanging here."

Slade yelled and then cursed softly. "Fokkers! They're coming up from a field there. Three of them—no, four—no, five. Coming up here."

He whirled.

"Damn these guns."

He began yanking at their breeches. Cursing under his breath, his torn fingers leaving blood smears on the guns.

"Those Fokkers are coming for us," Hale shouted. "They'll shoot us down and we can't move. We're just a target. It—that thing is holding us here waiting for them."

Slade's face was sweat-smeared. He glanced down at the Fokkers, spun back to his guns, tore furiously at them.

Hale clicked on his switch. But they were not moving now. The Hisso would not start. The prop blade was straight up and down.

"And not even a Colt to fight with," he cursed.

The Fokkers were winding up fast now. A spray of warning slugs streaked from the lead ship's snout. It was going to begin shooting soon.

Frantically Hale's eyes swept around him for something to fight back with. His eyes fell on the Very pistol in its clip at the side of the pit. He jerked it out and looked down. Two of the five Fokkers were almost ready to begin shooting. Suddenly he whirled and stuck the muzzle of the Very straight up in the air.

His finger twitched. A red fire-ball streaked up into the clouds. He rammed another cartridge in the breech, fired again. A green one this time.

Then with a sudden lurch the Spad tumbled. It nosed over, swung sickeningly, throwing the two Yanks against their coamings, then went spinning down.

Hale grabbed the threshing stick. The safety snapped across his belly as the Spad up-ended.

He found the twitching rudder bars,

jammed his feet on them and yanked the ship to an even keel.

Slade yelled.

"We're loose. That jerk—I grabbed my guns to hold on—got 'em clear now. Bring on the Jerrys!"

Hale nosed straight down. The screaming air spun the Hisso. It caught with a snort. He whipped out of the dive, circling, staring up at the clouds. But there was nothing there. Only swirling banks of cold mist.

But the Fokkers were coming in now. All five of them were burning sky and spraying slugs from their square noses like mad dogs drooling saliva.

Two were coming down on their tail. Slade's twin Lewis jabbered a screaming burst. One of the Fokkers fairly exploded in the sky as a tracer tore through its gas tank. But two came up under the Spad's floorboards.

Hale swished into a screaming bank to get out. Slade swung his Lewis down. They spat straight the the four Spandaus below.

Another Fokker arced in from the beam, its slugs pounding at the Spad's motor like leaden hammers.

Hale switched into a zigzag dive to get below the Fokkers. With his blind spot covered they would have to come at them from above.

The Hisso began sputtering. Black oil smoke was belching from its exhaust.

"They hit the motor," Hale yelled. "If I can't get it going again—hold 'em off that tail, I'll try to stay below 'em."

A Fokker came diving in from off the right. Hale whipped his nose up. Slade was trying to keep two off the tail. Tracer was ribboning their wings and fuselage.

For an instant Hale caught the diving Fokker in the ring. His Vickers sent a gibbering burst at it as he crouched between their dancing butts.

The Fokker arced away. The burst had been jerky.

The Hisso was sputtering badly now. It failed to turn the firing cams fast enough.

A numbing shock hit Hale's boot heel. The floorboards were dancing as slugs ripped through them. One of them had hit his heel, numbing his leg clear to the waist.

With a growl the Hisso stopped. The Spad spun dizzily. Hale beat frantically at the numbed leg with his fist and tried to force the foot back on the rudder. No use.

They tumbled, writhing down the sky in a rudderless ship. Slade was still trying to shoot, but the Spad's tumble continually threw him off the target.

The four Fokkers were swirling around them in a stream, but they were not shooting, and they stayed out of range of Slade's guns.

Hale got his foot back on the rudder, neutraled the controls with a jerk. The Spad's wings caught air and it pulled out of its tumble.

Slade yelled.

"One of those Jerrys is waving for us to go down on that field at the edge of Lileden."

"To hell with them," Hale roared. "We're going in those trees a couple of miles over that hill back of the town. If we land on that field they'll gobble us up. If we hit the trees we'll have a chance for a getaway."

Slade called back.

"And find out about this hanging business. Head for the trees. If the Jerry's get too close I'll knock 'em off."

He slammed fresh pans in his guns and crouched behind them, watching the Fokkers through slitted eyes.

Hale whipped the Spad's nose around toward the clot of trees. A Fokker shot in across their prop, its Spandaus clat-

tering. The pilot waved for them to turn back toward the field.

Slade's guns bounced against his hands, numbing his arms clear to the shoulder. The Fokker heeled away from the tracer with a jerk.

Then all four of them came in, guns slashing viciously at the Spad. Slade darted back and forth. His gun-barrels were almost red hot; his shoulders numb and dead.

Hale slammed the Spad's nose down, diving it hell-bent. But he held for the trees. They were rushing up terrifically now.

"Get set," he yelled to Slade. "I'll pancake her. No time to land."

Slade rammed a burst into a zooming Fokker's belly.

"Let her go," he croaked.

THEY hit the tree tops. Fabric split with a pop, spruce crackling like broken bones. Limbs and leaves swishing around them.

Hale wiped blood out of his eyes from a trickling cut on his forehead. Slade cursing softly, began climbing out on a broken limb.

"Hell of a mess," he snapped. "And all on account of—" He looked up at the cloud bank overhead—"something," he finished.

A rattling volley of shots split the forest silence. The two Yanks crouched tensely, looking around. Slade was in the tree. Hale was still in the Spad.

Slade said hoarsely.

"The place is full of Jerrys—looking for us already."

Hale suddenly reared up out of his pit, his arm pointing up.

"No," he gasped. "It's a pigeon—they're shooting at it. Look!"

A carrier pigeon was swiveling up from the woods. Rifle-lead splattered the sky around it with screaming slugs.

"It's one of our pigeons or the Jerrys wouldn't be trying to shoot it," Hale gasped. "There's a G-2 man around here somewhere. Look, they got it!"

The pigeon's flight had faltered. Its wings flapped weakly. It was rolling over and over, plummeting down. Scattering feathers floated after it.

"We've got to get out of here quick," Slade rasped. "They'll be over here after us. Come on."

They dropped to the ground, crouched, looking around. "No guns," Slade clipped. "Wish I had a Colt to knock over a few of 'em when they come."

"Shove your dirty face at 'em," Hale snapped. "That'll scare 'em off."

Then before Slade could answer he started on the run through the woods.

Slade followed, panting. Fokkers were still roaring around overhead. Suddenly Hale halted. Ahead was a deep ravine. Its bottom was covered with a dense mass of brush. It would make an excellent hiding place.

He pointed, whispering.

"Someone has been down here. See where the bank is caved off—the dirt slid down."

Slade ran to the place, bent over a dark blotch in the loose dirt.

A guttural voice yelled somewhere in back of them. Slade said hoarsely:

"Blood! Look! A trail of it. More of it down there in that ravine at the bottom."

Hale cut in excitedly.

"That G-2 man was wounded trying to escape—he sent up that pigeon. The Jerrys are after him. Here, we'll kick dirt over this blood so they won't see it and try to find him. Maybe we'll learn something."

He swiped his foot across the dirt, covering the blood, and then leaped to the bottom of the ravine. A spotted trail of blood led off through the brush and

toward a towering oak tree, an eighth of a mile away.

Ducking low in the brush, keeping out of sight, they raced along that grim trail of red life. Smearred leaves and splotches on the ground marked the places where the wounded man had fallen.

"He's hit bad," Slade panted. "Maybe dead now. This blood is three or four hours old."

"Probably the one that sent the message the general had," Hale said. "Must have thought he was dying and sent it off before he had time to finish it. Then came to and tried to send another by that pigeon we just saw shot."

Suddenly he stopped and pointed excitedly.

"Look, there he is—behind that big tree. You can just see his head and feet. Looks dead."

Slade pushed forward.

"We'll find out. He might have a gun too. I want one."

They crowded through the brush and eased carefully around the huge tree trunk. The man was dead. Blood soaked his left side. Flies buzzed around it.

He was dressed in the uniform of a German captain of the air force. A Luger lay at his side. Slade scooped it up.

Hale grabbed Slade's arm and pointed at a wicker cage that lay at the dead man's side.

"A pigeon crate!" he shouted. "That's what they keep carrier pigeons in. This is the G-2 man all right. The pigeons were hidden here."

The tree made an excellent hiding place. It was partly hollow. Its roots formed high arches above the ground like a tangle of writhing snakes.

Slade's eyes widened in his dirty face.

"He's the man that wrote that bloody note."

Hale nodded.

"He still had a bloody stick in his hand.

That's what he wrote with—used his own blood for ink. Guts! That's what—guts."

Suddenly he was on his knees digging under the roots.

"If he hid pigeons here, then he might have something else too. Uniforms—something. Look through his pockets."

Slade stooped over the dead man. Hale pawed under the tree roots, came up with another Luger.

"Something else here too," he whispered. Feels like a bundle."

He stooped down again, reaching in the tangle of roots.

Slade was squatted by the dead man, looking through his papers. He said in a low voice,

"This man couldn't run far, hit the way he was. We're close to von Heigenmer and that thing the note warned about."

Hale drew out a huge bundle, tore it open.

"Uniforms," he said hoarsely. "German uniforms—hid here. Disguises this man had. If they'll only fit us."

He held up the coat of a lieutenant in the aviation. It was too big for him. He tossed it to Slade.

"Clean clothes for you. Get into 'em quick. There's more here—plenty."

A shout from behind them made both men whirl, crouching. The Jerrys were combing the woods. There were more shouts, followed by a couple of shots.

Slade began yanking on the clothes Hale had tossed him.

"Hurry," he whispered. "They'll be here in a minute. We'll take the bird cage with us and throw it somewhere. Shove our own clothing under the tree roots. If they don't see the cage they won't look in there."

Hale was dressed in a uniform that fit him.

They could hear the crackling of brush now. Hobnailed boots were tramping

through it. Guttural voices were getting louder with every breath.

Hale crammed their clothes under the roots, whispered.

"Come on—run—this way."

They ducked into the brush again.

STUMBLING, panting, tripping over creepers, they ran for half an hour. Hale was in the lead now. He stopped in a shady spot. Panting, Slade came up.

"Remember where we picked up that trail of blood?" Hale asked.

Slade nodded. He was loading the Luger he had found.

Hale went on.

"That place is between the tree and Lileden. He must have come from Lileden to get to his pigeons—after he was shot. We'll go there and find out what it was—what he meant by that note."

Slade looked around quickly.

"There's a hole in that. I don't speak German. I can't go around there."

"We'll have to try it," Hale snapped. "Besides von Heigenmer's base must be somewhere near here, and judging by that note he's the man back of these disappearances."

Slade shoved the Luger in his pocket.

"You're right. You do the talking. I'll act dumb. But for God's sake, do it good. We're in German uniforms you know. Gettin' shot in a fight is one thing—gettin' it from a firing squad, when your hands are tied, is something else."

"You'll make a good dumb man," Hale snapped. "But for once you're clean. That uniform is anyway."

Slade snorted.

"And you're dirtier'n hell. I hope those clothes have cooties in 'em."

Hale's eyes snapped fire. He scratched his right arm-pit, grimaced and started toward Lileden.

Lileden was merely a small clot of stone houses at the edge of the air field. The

two Yanks walked boldly out of the trees and walked toward the hangars.

Three or four Fokkers were in front of the hangars. One of them had its motor ticking over, and a mechanic was sitting on its cowl working on the Mercedes.

Slade hissed out of the corner of his mouth.

"Don't forget about this talking business, and be careful."

Hale nodded and whispered.

"If we try to hide out they'll suspect us. The more daring we are the more we can get away with. Come on, we'll go right up to the office. Act like we belong here."

Slade shook his head.

"If we don't get shot for this, it won't be your fault. You're doing your best to get us caught."

Hale grunted.

"Notice there's not many men around here. Most of them are likely in those woods looking for that G-2 man—and us. I'm going straight in the office like I'm reporting the results of that search. You wait outside. If things get nasty we'll try to grab that Fokker over there. You wait here."

Slade stopped just outside the office door. Hale walked boldly inside. He was gambling everything on the hope that the last place the Germans would look for a spy was in the very office where they were directing a search for one.

A gruff-looking German colonel looked up sharply from his place behind the desk.

"Well?" he growled.

Hale clicked his heels and saluted.

"I come to report, Excellency, that so far the search for the wounded American spy has not been successful. Are there any other orders?"

"Ja," the German snapped, "von Heigenmer will take the heads off of all of us if he is not found. There were two of them. We found the other one. He is dead. And we must catch those two

Amerikaners who were shot down, too.”

But Hale had seen something on the desk. Something he wanted. It was a paper marked “Secret,” and von Heigenmer’s signature was scrawled across the bottom. At the top were a few printed words that made up the letter head.

Von Heigenmer’s address! The place they were looking for! Hale decided that he was going to have that letter.

The German colonel saw him glance at the letter. He grabbed it up and turned it face down. His eyes were darkly suspicious.

Suddenly he reared to his feet.

“Who are you?” he demanded sharply. “Where did you come from? What do you want?”

He leaned forward.

“You are another of their damned spies—orderly! Ord—”

Hale’s back stiffened, his knees half-bent, then suddenly straightened as he sent his fist crashing at the German’s chin. Sweat spurted out of every pore on his body with the effort he put in that ramrodded blow.

The German went back over his chair, crashed against the wall and slid to the floor in a thunder of noise.

The letter fluttered off the desk.

Hale leaped for it, grabbed it up and went dashing for the door just as a wide-eyed orderly came hurrying in another door.

Hale yelled to Slade.

“Quick—that Fokker—get it. I’ve found what we want.”

Already the orderly was screaming.

“*Amerikaners! Amerikaners! Spies!*”

Instantly the place was in an uproar. A half-dozen men came dashing out of the hangars. Hut doors popped open. Officers came running out, guns in their hands.

A slug whined past Hale’s ear. Another tore a piece out of his sleeve. Slade’s long

legs were slicing down the field. He whirled. His Luger spat. A German clawed at his breast, went down.

The mech on the Fokker was standing up now. He had a heavy wrench in his hand. His arm came up to throw the wrench at Slade.

Hale stopped in his stride, whipped out his gun, fired. The mech’s arms went high above his head. He toppled off the Fokker.

Slade reached the ship, and leaping on the left lower wing rammed his boot through the side of the fuselage, and hooked his knee around a longeron.

Hale leaped for the pit. A German grabbed the wing, holding it down. Five more were running up.

Slade rolled half over. His gun spat again. The German went down. Hale’s fist hit the throttle. The Fokker leaped, waddled over its chocks, and started down field. Another German threw himself on the tail assembly.

Slade fired again. The German rolled off, but his leg caught in the vertical rudder. He was dragging behind the taxiing ship, holding it up. The others were gaining.

Feverishly, Hale whipped the ship from side to side. The German jerked off. The Fokker roiled up in a level climb.

Up—up—up!

Hale looked down. There was no attempt at pursuit. It would be impossible for the Germans to get a crate out, warm it and take off now.

If only there weren’t any more of them in the sky!

SLADE was clinging to the wing and looking around. Hale’s eyes swept the cloudy sky. It was late afternoon now. It would be dark in another couple of hours. He fished the letter from his pocket, glanced at it.

He leaned way over his coaming and shouted to Slade.

"According to this letter, von Heigenmer's address is Issetere. We'll get there—see what we can find. Have to hurry before they warn him about us. It's only twenty miles."

Slade nodded and looked up at the clouds.

"We won't have much time," he yelled. "They'll phone ahead—may even be waiting for us when we get there."

Then with a jerk that threw Hale against the crash pad and almost whipped Slade off the wing, the Fokker stopped dead.

Its motor was roaring straight ahead. Its prop was biting the air like mad. Yet the ship stood dead still in the sky.

Then it started going backwards. Slowly at first, then faster and faster. And all the time it was steadily rising closer and closer to the cloud bank.

"It's got us!" Slade screamed. "It's got us again!"

Hale was dumfounded. His whole body seemed to tingle like it was filled with electrical particles. He stared up. Nothing but the clouds overhead. He tried to swallow but his throat refused to work.

Slade had clawed himself to a standing position. His big hands were gripping the coaming with a death-like clamp. His neck craned back, he stared at the clouds.

"It's got us—again. It's got us—again," he kept repeating to himself.

Steadily the Fokker rose toward the clouds, then it disappeared into their damp belly. Fog closed around them like a cold, impenetrable veil. Hale woke up with a start and began fumbling around inside the pit.

"No Very pistol here," he grunted. "I wish we had one. We got loose with it the other time."

Slade jerked out his Luger and emptied it straight up. But the Fokker kept

going—backwards. Hale tried his and still the Fokker kept going. He looked dazedly at the tachometer. It read 2200, and they were traveling backwards!

With a taut shrug he cut the switch.

Slade was growling to himself.

"No more ammunition. I can't shoot any more."

Hale fumbled through his pockets, shook his head.

"Neither have I—but it won't do any good anyway."

"Unless we meet—it," Slade said awedly.

"We—" Hale started. "I don't know whether we will or not."

For a moment they were dead quiet, staring up. Somehow they sensed that they were steadily rising, but they couldn't be sure. They were moving, they knew that.

Wires were screaming the cry of a dead stick in a sharp dive, but they were level, and steadily going backwards.

Slade began pounding the coaming with his fist. "If we could only see it—fight it!" he yelled.

Hale nodded tensely.

"That would help," he agreed hoarsely. "This sitting still—" His voice trailed off.

Then they both gasped unbelievably. A man was coming out of the cloud toward them. A German! Coming straight down, out of nothing! From nowhere!

First his boots came into sight. Slowly his legs, then his waist—shoulders and head. His feet touched the Fokker's upper wing. It rocked gently. Then he moved over toward the Spandaus on the cowl and sat down, straddling them.

Hale managed an awed whisper through his stiff lips.

"He came down a rope ladder—I didn't see it at first—a rope ladder."

The German stared at them for a mo-

ment, grinning and holding onto the ladder.

Slade swallowed gulpily.

The ship's wires continued to scream as they cut air. The German said:

"Go up—you two—climb the ladder."

He held it toward Hale and motioned up toward the blank cloud overhead. Hale glanced up. The ladder seemed to disappear into nothingness; to just fade away.

He shook his head.

"What's up there?" he half snarled.

The Jerry answered:

"Baron von Heigenmer and his—" He stopped, stared at them for a moment, then motioned up. "You might as well go up, you are prisoners."

Hale held back. He was trying to find out what was up there. Slade said nothing, but his big hands were opening and shutting.

"Prisoners of whom?" Hale snapped.

"Of ours," the German said gravely. "You might as well go up—you can't get away."

"There's sense in what he says," he said. "Besides, it will give us our chance to find out what this thing is."

"I guess you're right," Slade agreed.

The breeze swung the ladder against the big man. He grabbed it, swung into space and started up into the cloud. Hale watched him disappear, then he reached for the rope.

It trembled in his hands as Slade climbed up. Then it quit. Slade was gone.

Hale started climbing up.

He had climbed perhaps twenty feet when he happened to glance back down. The Fokker was following him straight up! The German was calmly coiling the rope ladder in its pit!

"My God," Hale breathed. "What are we up against?"

He went on.

A bloated belly appeared above him.

There was a square black spot in it. The ladder disappeared into the black spot.

But the thing had all the appearances of being a new world. Its size was incredible. There seemed to be no end to its length nor breadth. The cloud blotted out its lines completely.

The Fokker was still following. Steadily, slowly, surely.

A HEAD appeared in the opening above. It was the head of a huge man with an unlit pipe in his mouth. His hair had been shaved off and his head glistened like a billiard ball.

His features were broad and heavy, but there was a gleam of wicked brutality, and at the same time, sharp shrewdness in his blue eyes.

Hale climbed through the hole, stepped off the ladder onto a platform and stared around. Slade was standing there and a man was at his back holding a Luger pressed against him.

He felt something rammed in his own ribs and looked down. It was a Luger.

The big man grinned in his face. The grin almost made Hale shudder.

"Well?" he said deliberately. "I suppose this is the crazy von Heigenmer I have heard of, eh?"

The German's face reddened angrily. His fists went above his head in a furious gesture.

"The crazy von Heigenmer!" he screamed. "I'll teach you, you heathen *Amerikanar*. Oh, I know you are a Yankee. Didn't I see you in your ship this morning, and wasn't it fortunate that I happened to be returning to my base just in time to see you steal that Fokker from the Lileden field? Twice I catch you," he grated. "This will be the last time."

Hale was looking around him trying to guess what manner of a machine they were in. Slide said:

"It's a Zep, Hale. A big one. We're inside its envelope, and they've got some

kind of silencers on their motors.”

Von Heigenmer slapped his first into Slade's face.

“Shut up,” he bellowed. “When I want you to talk I will say so.”

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before Slade's big fist plastered him straight on the nose. The German went back into the arms of one of his men like he had been catapulted. His unlit pipe dropped to the floor.

Three men threw themselves onto Slade's broad back, bore him down.

Von Heigenmer stiffened his half-bent knees, wiped blood from his nose, smearing it in a red streak across his cheek.

Slade's arms were pinned behind him now. He was helpless. Von Heigenmer howled.

“Let him up. Hold him tight, but let him up. I have it! In the olden days they made men walk the plank. We will do that to these two, as soon as we go below the clouds. Both of them—this big *Hunden* first. I will give him one big kick as he goes over.”

“Yeah,” Slade snarled as he got up. “And I'll take you with me you lousy coward.”

Hale sidled up against him.

“Steady, Slade,” he hissed. “We've got to find out how this thing works—what it is first. I've got a half-cocked idea we might be able to get out of this if it's played right.”

Von Heigenmer was talking to another German, giving some kind of orders in a low voice. The man hurried away.

Slade grunted.

“Chances are pretty thin,” he muttered under his breath.

Just then the Fokker slid up under the open hatch and clung there. The German who had climbed down the ladder stepped out.

Hale whispered to Slade.

“Our chances are mighty slim, I'll admit, but—”

Von Heigenmer cut in.

“Wilmer, put irons on their arms. Later we will make them walk the plank. Let them fall nine thousand feet, head over heels. And we will watch them!”

Wilmer, the one von Heigenmer had whispered to, was back now with the irons. He stepped in front of Slade. Hale winked at the big man. Slade held out his wrists. The irons clicked on them. Then Hale was ironed. As the handcuffs clicked on his wrists he noticed that they were not made of the usual hard steel. They were aluminum!

The German snapped. “Lock them in that storeroom there until I am ready to drop overboard. We shot the other big spy, but the little one slipped away. These two will not. I will make sure of that.”

In a dead silence the two men were conducted to an aluminum-walled storeroom and locked in. Hale's eyes tried to pierce the velvet black gloom. The manacles on his hands clicked ominously.

Slade grunted.

“This thing gets worse and worse.”

“I wonder why von Heigenmer and his Zep have been concentrating over our field?” Hale asked. “He can't have any particular grudge against our outfit.”

“I thought it was funny at first, too,” Slade replied. “It's obvious, though, when you think it over, that in some way he's gotten wind of the fact that our gang has been designated to bump him off, and naturally he wants to get us before we do.”

Hale agreed dismally.

“Anyway we know why he's afraid of shooting,” he finished hopefully.

“Why?”

“Remember the Very pistol? He's afraid of fire—it might set off the gas in this thing. I guess we were too far down for the Lugers to reach him.”

"That's right," Slade agreed. "And he must have seen my guns jam this morning. That's why he captured a two-seater. It's his first one. He can handle a single-seater so that its guns can't reach him."

Hale was fumbling around in the dark, trying to find something to use as a weapon.

"Yes," he agreed over his shoulder in the direction of Slade's voice. "And you notice they had a gun in your back when you hit the von—and they didn't shoot."

Slade's voice was suddenly excited. "This place is a storeroom for tools. Here, I've found 'em. A hammer. There's a crowbar here too, and they're made of aluminum!"

Hale was searching the walls with fumbling fingers.

"Wires!" he gasped. "Big ones. They go through the floor. Take those tools, we'll rip it up. I've got a hunch these wires will solve the mystery. We'll follow them—try to destroy whatever it is."

Already Slade was trying feverishly to push the point of the bar into a crack in the board floor. The board split, cracked, broke.

For a moment they listened. Had anyone heard that? Their hearts throbbed in their ears.

"Try it again," Hale whispered. "He must be close to his base. He'll dump us out before he goes down—finish us off like he did those G-2 men that hid their clothes under that tree. He must have killed the big man quick. It was the smaller one we found."

Slade heaved down on the bar again.

Another board split. They had a hole now almost big enough. Hale felt around it. A splinter tore his finger.

"Not big enough yet," he whispered. "Give it another—one more board."

Slade, panting, sweating, his manacles clicking, heaved again. Another board ripped up. Steps were throbbing on the

floor outside. They came to the door. The lock rattled.

"Get down there," Hale whispered. "Quick, before that door opens. Follow those wires."

Slade slid his wide shoulders into the hole. Hale pushed him, shoving him farther. Slade got down. The key rasped again.

Hale fumbled in the dark for the hammer, found it and went head first through the hole. Two wide, longitudinal girders were on either side of him. Slade was ahead. Hale started after him.

The Zeppelin's outer fabric rustled under their hands and knees. All that was between them and a bottomless drop was a thin piece of cloth. Hale held his breath.

Slade whispered. "Light ahead. Come on. Looks like a hole."

Behind them was a muffled shout. Their escape had been discovered. Hale prodded Slade's legs.

"Hurry, hurry," he whispered. "We got to hurry. Follow these wires."

SLADE stopped suddenly. A muffled curse split his lips. His legs and arms were threshing like the tentacles of a wounded octopus.

Then Hale felt a tug at his clothes. It was like an unseen hand was trying to rip them from his body. They were pulling up. His buttoned coat threatened to slide over his head; his feet felt like they were being drawn ahead of his body.

The drag was relentless, almost irresistible. It threatened to double him up. He struggled in the smotheringly small space.

His hand touched a huge plate of cold iron. The wires were attached to it. It was at least four feet across. The metal buttons on his clothes clicked against its hard surface.

"Magnets!" he gasped. "Big magnets! That's how he catches these ships. That's why these handcuffs and tools are aluminum.

"Why, the magnetic field created by these gigantic positive and negative poles must be enormous. They attracted the Fokker when it was at least a thousand yards away. When the dynamos charging these poles are running full tilt the sphere of activity of these magnets must extend for miles."

Slade had wrenched himself free from the magnet, although half the metal buttons were torn off his clothes, and some of the nails had pulled out of his shoes.

Hale was struggling against it. Sweat plastered his body. He felt like he was smothering, cramped in that tiny space, held by the unseen force of the powerful magnets. And he had no way to cut those wires.

There was a tearing sound as the metal buttons ripped off his clothes. He crawled on with the magnet pulling at the nails in his shoes.

Now there was a steady jabber of voices behind. The hole ahead offered the only possible escape. The light was stronger now. Slade whispered:

"It's the hole we climbed in. The Fokker is right under it."

Hale grabbed Slade's heel, twitched it, to attract his attention. He said hoarsely: "Get down in that Fokker's pit—push the back of the seat forward, climb behind it—in the fuselage."

Slade husked.

"We can't take off in it."

"No," Hale snapped. "But they'll have to drop it before they can land. We'll have to capture it then—put some slugs through this Zep's gas bags and burn it."

Slade inched forward on his belly. Hale watched around his shoulder. Slade pushed the bar ahead of him, heaved on it. There was a noise of something splitting. He crawled on ahead, disappeared into the Fokker's pit.

Hale crawled in after him, and drew the seat back into its place.

Slade choked. "You stink," he grunted. "You're dirtier than hell. You stink in this little place."

They were doubled into tight balls in the cramped fuselage. Hale sniffed. He did stink, but von Heigenmer was overhead now. He was bawling orders.

"You fool! You let them escape from that room! Get in that Fokker and land it. The base is directly below. We will release you; then you land. Tell them down there to form a tight ring around the whole field. We will land and find those two swine. And when we do—"

They heard his heavy boots stomp away in a furious stride.

Hale gripped the **hammer in his manacled hands.**

The Fokker swayed as the German stepped into its pit. They felt him test the stick and rudder. Then he yelled to let her go. Hale caught his breath, held it. Slade's fingers clamped tight on Hale's ankles.

The Fokker tumbled. Fell like a rock.

THERE was a smothered curse of surprise from the German as he noticed the Fokker's lack of balance. The Mercedes bawled as it got full switch on. But the Fokker was wabbling sickly. It was tail-heavy, and too heavily loaded.

Hale grabbed at the back of the seat, braced his feet on a longeron and heaved. The German in the pit grunted. Hale heaved again. The back of the seat shoved forward.

He stuck his head and shoulders out the space back of the seat. The German whirled, saw him, reached for his gun.

The Fokker was tumbling like a stone now. Its nose straight up. It was going back down its tail like a wingless rock.

The German reared back trying to pinch Hale between the seat and the coaming, at the same time hunting for his gun.

Hale writhed his arms out. He swung the hammer. It clunked down on the

German's helmet with a jerk that wrenched it from the Yank's fingers.

The German's feet kicked spasmodically. His legs hit the stick. The Fokker rolled completely around. He had neglected to fasten the safety belt. He went out, end over end, tumbling down the sky.

Hale was holding on with his fingers, his teeth, hooking his legs onto the seat back. The Fokker was rolling and tumbling, its controls threshing back and forth.

The ground was hurtling up, the huge Zeppelin was floating overhead. It was below the clouds now.

"Quick," Hale screamed. "Slade! Crawl up here—out of that tail."

Then he began wriggling over the seat back and toward the controls. He gripped the threshing stick, clung to it and slid into the seat.

The altimeter read a thousand feet.

His feet jabbed at the rudder. Found it, neutralized it. He hauled back on the stick. The Fokker's wings slapped air as it heaved out of the dive and came up in a screaming zoom, straight up at the belly of the huge Zeppelin close overhead.

Up, up, up! Hale felt Slade's fingers clutch the back of the seat. The weight was balanced now.

Slade screamed: "Give it to him! Right smack in the belly."

Von Heigenmer's broad face was staring at them out of the hole in the Zep's belly. He whirled. They could see his lips moving as they snapped orders to the hidden crew.

"He's ordering the magnets turned on," Hale yelled. "He's going to grab us again."

"Shoot!" Slade yelled. "Shoot! before the magnets make this ship fly level. You can't hit him with those guns then."

"Not close enough—can't shoot that far," Hale rasped. "A second now."

Then they felt the relentless pull of the magnets. Drawing them up—up—up un-

der that silvery bag.

Slade was yelling.

"Shoot, shoot, damn it, shoot!"

Hale was crouching over the stick, his eyes glued to that huge ship up there. Waiting—waiting. A hundred yards more, fifty. The magnet was on full power on.

Twenty-five yards. The Fokker was beginning to sway like it was going to level out.

His fingers stabbed at the trips. The Spandaus howled, clickety-clack. Feathery slugs streaked up, disappeared into the huge gas filled bag. Fire-balls—hot, smoking lead!

The whole sky seemed filled with a sudden swoosh of crackling flame and black, choking smoke. The big Zep crumpled and began tumbling, strewing flaming fabric after it.

The Fokker slewed away, yawed, bucked in the flame-stirred air, then Hale fought it to an even keel.

The Zeppelin was falling straight into the center of its home base. A base that would soon be smothered in crackling flames. Von Heigenmer's field would be his bier.

Hale headed straight up toward the covering clouds overhead.

"We'll go back in 'em," he yelled at Slade. "No ship'll ever find us in there, and we'll stay there 'till we get home and report it—to old wartface."

Slade took a deep breath. His chin was resting on Hale's shoulder. He was peering straight ahead.

"Whew!" he said. "You stink. How does it feel to change from a tailor's dummy to a dirty, fighting bum?"

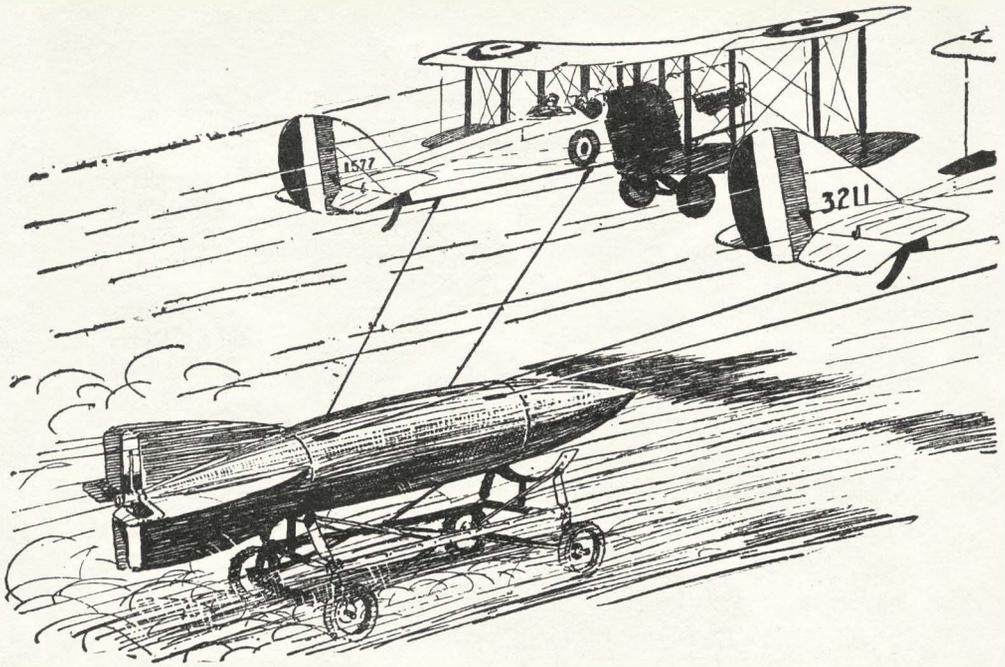
Hale looked back at Slade's clothes.

"About the same as it feels for you to get cleaned up once," he snapped.

Slade grinned, clasped his manacled hands together and shook them.

"I shake on that for you, kid," he yelled. "I know just how you feel then."

THE DYNAMITE MONSTER



Story Behind the Cover

By **FREDERICK BLAKESLEE**

I MET Ed in the Savoy Grill in London. We had not seen each other since I had been in England three years before, so naturally we sat down, ordered drinks and spent the rainy afternoon talking over old times.

Finally, "I suppose you're over digging up ideas, what?" he asked.

"Among other things," I answered. "Have you any ideas around loose?" and I explained what I was after.

"Inventions is it?" he said. "Well, I don't know of any unless—"

"Unless what?" I urged.

"Oh nothing, I was just thinking of something I heard some time ago, but you're after authentic material, aren't you?"

I told him I was.

"There you are," he returned. "I can't prove it because Bill Totling told it and someone told Bill, or so he says, and you'd have to trace the story to the original source.

"As long as the story had a source, that's all the proof I require, so tell it."

"All right," he began, "but keep this in mind, personally I think Bill was pulling our legs. It was at the annual binge of the *W. B. C. Bill said that late in 1918 we were experimenting with a bomb to drop on Berlin that was to be carried by two airplanes. The bomb was to be slung between the ships by cables. At the

*I have called it the W B C (War Birds Club) which is not its real name.—AUTHOR.

proper place it was to be released by electricity from one of the ships."

"I'd like to hear more of the details," I said.

"Why don't you look up Bill and ask him?"

I thanked Ed and we parted. I found that Bill lived on Taviton Street which was near my hotel so that very night I called on him. He remembered the story.

"Sid Stanley told it to me," he said to my question, "Who told it to Sid I don't know, it's one of those yarns that has been told to so many people that without a doubt it has been changed in the telling, but I have reason to think that it has some foundation in fact."

"That's all the proof I need," I said, "perhaps you can answer some questions. What kind of ships were to be used?"

"That I don't know. They experimented with deHavillands."

"Why deHavillands?"

"I suppose because they were easier to handle in the take-off. The idea was to train the pilots on the lighter ship before handling the heavier planes."

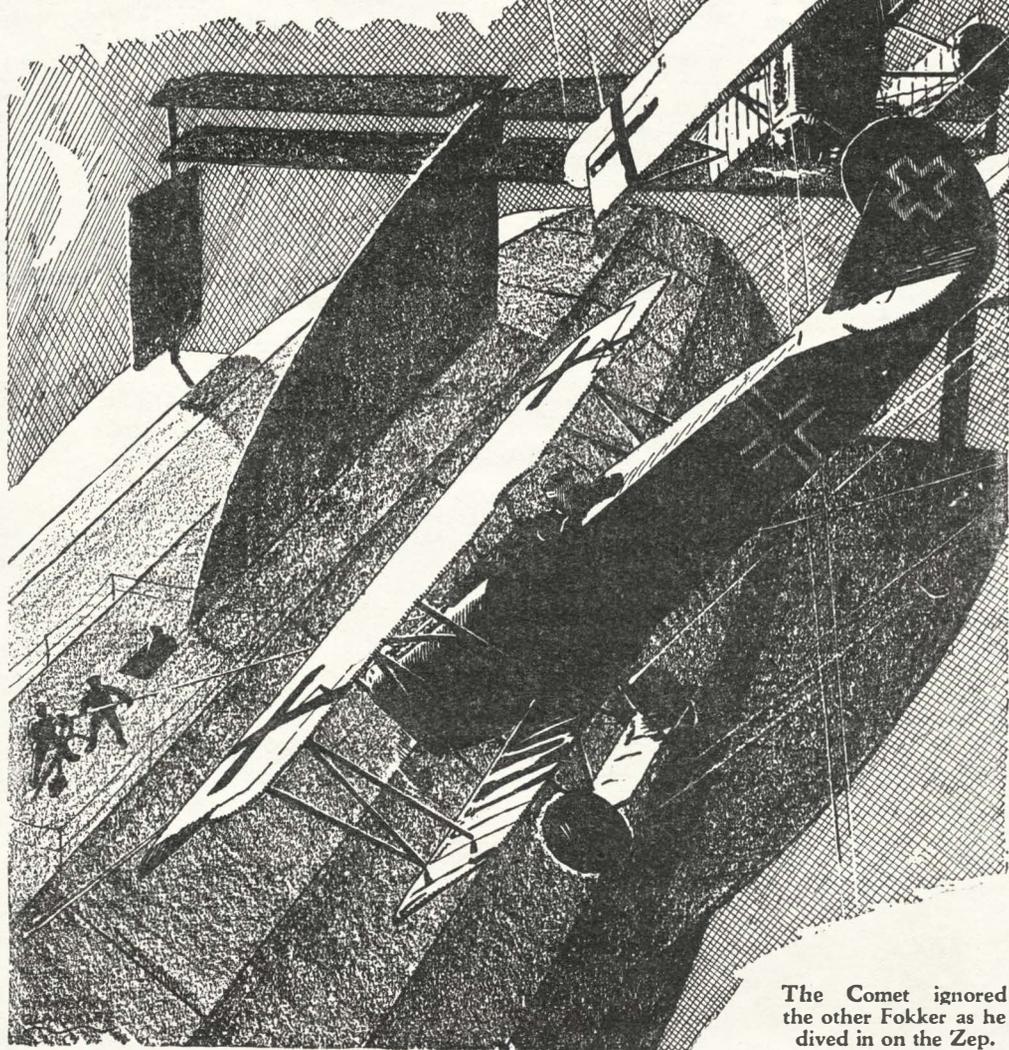
"I see. Well, how did they take off?"

"The bomb was on a carriage. The ships took up position on either side of the bomb, dragged it between them, rose in the air and gradually took up the load of the bomb lifting it off the carriage and there you are. Sid said they actually got in the air with one too."

The BLACK 13

By DARRELL JORDAN

One minute they were battling those Boche raiders—the next they were hurtling earthward, dead men with flesh turned black as coal! And only one Yank had a clue to this ghastly death, knew that he would have to track it down alone through skies of sable doom!



The Comet ignored the other Fokker as he dived in on the Zep.

CAPTAIN LEE JACKSON, better known to the air services of five nations by his nickname of the Comet, shifted his lean six feet of whipcord body and gazed across the desk into the troubled features of General Halleck, big shot at Divisional Headquarters.

"Read this," the general said quietly, tossing a tattered scrap of paper upon the desk.

Without speaking, the Comet picked up the soiled message. A single sentence was scrawled hurriedly upon the paper, a short one that broke off abruptly.

"Beware of new—at—" the Comet read aloud. "The fourth word is so blurred I can't make it out, and whoever wrote it didn't get far enough to tell us where the location was."

"You notice that the message is signed Z-11. Z-11 is one of our agents in the St. Lorraine area. That message came in here this morning by carrier pigeon. If my theory is correct, the poor devil has faced a firing squad by this time. I believe that he was suspected and started the message just as the Boches closed in on him. He probably stuffed what he had written into the pigeon's message container and freed the bird just as they grabbed him."

"But what do you think he referred to?" the Comet asked.

"I haven't the faintest idea," General Halleck frowned, "that's why I sent for you. You've done some good work here at D. H. Q., acting as sort of aerial detective and trouble-shooter. I want you to fly over that sector and see if you can locate anything wrong."

The staff officer arose and crossed to a map tacked to the wall. With his finger he traced a small circle.

"The territory contained in that circle was covered by Z-11. Probably whatever he tried to warn us about is there, or near there. It may mean nothing, or it might

mean the success or failure of the huge American drive soon to be launched. In any case, we can't take chances. We know that the Boches are expecting an attack, though of course the exact date has been carefully kept secret. But it's possible that this thing Z-11 mentioned is some defense the enemy has worked out."

"Certainly, sir, I'll take a look."

The Comet strode from the room to the H. Q. tarmac. A crisp command and his trim Spad was wheeled out and the Hisso twisted into crackling life.

As he hurtled toward the lines a few moments later he fervently cursed the drizzle of rain that fell steadily. For three days now a steady rain had blanketed France with no signs of let-up. Practically all offensive patrols had been grounded, and while to many of the line squadrons the weather represented a welcome vacation from war's grim business, the Comet chafed at the lack of action. Combat, the thrill of pitting his wits and skill against an adversary, was the spice of life to him.

Almost before he realized it the Yank trouble-shooter was circling over the St. Lorraine area, eyes keenly scanning the terrain below. For fifteen minutes the Spad quartered back and forth like a hunting dog seeking the trail of game. Suddenly the Yank tensed, peering downward.

Beneath him appeared a wide field at one end of which a newly built structure sprawled its huge shape. Tall stacks arose from one end of the building, giving it the appearance of a factory. The opposite end terminated in an immensely long, low shed. At the opposite side of the field loomed the familiar outlines of hangars.

A second look showed trucks crawling along a rutted road from the main highway. Tiny figures scurried to and fro; smoke belched spasmodically from the tall

chimneys. The whole scene teemed with activity.

"I should smile something is going on," the Virginian drawled aloud, "but what? I'll take a closer look."

But he was destined to wait for that look, for even as he thrust the Spad's nose earthward a familiar sound snapped out behind him.

Tat-tat-tat-tat! Bullets smacked down on the Spad, ricocheted whiningly from the motor bonnet. The Comet wasted no time in looking back. Cursing at his blindness in letting a Jerry creep upon him he twisted from the dive into a steep bank, then into a chandelle.

Even as he turned the black snouted Vickers barked out a warming burst. And they were still barking as a black-crossed Fokker swam into his vision, a Fokker from which twin Spandaus winked wickedly at him.

The next second the Boche had dived past and was turning. Out of the corner of his eye the Comet saw a half dozen props begin swinging on Fokkers squatting on the tarmac below.

The Yank jerked the Spad over in a loop, narrowly escaping a vicious gust of lead from the climbing Boche. Then the Fokker was falling off in a slip, and the Comet slipped with him. Like a flash the Spad rolled, snapped out, rolled again, beautifully.

The Comet's fingers tightened on the Bowden's. Barely a dozen shots ripped from the Vickers, but they were enough. Squarely into the Fokker's fuel tank the short burst plowed.

Instantly a blast of flame poured from the doomed crate and the Comet turned his eyes aside with a little shudder. It wasn't a pleasant thing to watch, a man roasting to death in the air!

Blam! Puff-blam! The Spad swayed wildly as anti-aircraft guns around the field below bellowed into sudden life.

Then as abruptly as they had started firing they ceased. And the Yank knew why, even before his quick glance picked up the fire-spitting specks swarming up at him.

At least a dozen Maltese-crossed Boches were roaring up, hot for his blood. Only a fool or a maniac would have waited alone to face that armada, and the Virginian was neither.

"No chance of a better look now," he muttered, banking toward home as his gloved hand slammed the throttle.

The flight of Fokkers gave up the chase as the Comet sped across the lines heralded by a salvo from archie, and a moment later vanished into the gathering dusk.

Then, behind the American lines for the second time that afternoon the Comet caught the distant drone of motors, and as he cut the Hiss to a soft throb, the staccato pound of machine-gun fire.

Impulsively he gunned the Spad toward the sounds. A queer hunch of impending menace laid chilling hands upon his spine as he raced onward. Abruptly he realized why. The distant scrap was leading him directly toward Perrincourt, and at Perrincourt was one of the great American supply and ammo dumps! The Yank's face set as he slashed through the driving rain.

A few seconds later a curious panorama swam into his field of vision. Below was Perrincourt, and a half dozen ships were edging in over the dump. A lone Spad tried courageously to hold them back. Then the radiant beams of searchlights sliced up, flooding the drizzling sky with brilliance.

The six attackers were revealed as Fokkers. About a dozen Spads were arrowing up to the aid of their lone comrades.

The Comet's eyes narrowed curiously as he roared nearer and nearer. A filmy curtain seemed spreading over the fields

occupied by the dump, like some enormous shadow cast by another world. In and out of the shadow darted the shapes of the fighters, flame spurting flickeringly from Spandaus and Vickers.

One Fokker went spinning down as the Comet urged the last ounce of power from the Hisso in an effort to get into the fight.

Then he tensed in sudden horror. One by one the sky rained Spads. Not flaming but hurtling earthward unmistakably out of control!

And one by one, then several all at once, they crashed! Thirteen American ships wiped out practically simultaneously.

THE Comet knew that gunfire alone hadn't done that, knew with a feeling of horror that something far more terrible than Spandaus was responsible for the snuffing out of those Yank lives!

But the confusion was not yet complete. Two hurtling dots suddenly appeared from the lowering clouds, arrowing straight for the dump below. Smaller dots detached themselves from the diving ships, and a second later all heel erupted into the dreary heavens!

Scattered explosions at first, then a horrible wall of flame swept over the dump as piles of high explosive ignited and flung their power into the sky. Already near the edge of the dump and a hundred feet from that curious shadowy portion of the sky, the Spad was tossed like a feather upward and away from the field.

For moments that seemed like eternity the Comet fought the bucking controls. He was vaguely aware that shadowy shapes were flitting past him, heading toward Germany.

A moment later as the Spad's controls gripped the air the Comet found himself boring in at a D-7 with both Vickers spouting flame. Savagely the Boche whirled to fight as the rest of the staffel droned onward out of hearing.

The gloom became a web criss-crossed with weaving lines of tracer. The Comet found his adversary a master, and try as he would he could not drive home a fatal burst. But neither could the German.

Abruptly, as the two ships danced across the sky, a lone searchlight lanced its finger of radiance across the fighters, held the Fokker for an instant in a steady glare. And in that split-second, which turned night into day, the face of the German seemed to leap at the dumfounded Yank.

The Boche wore no helmet, and waving in the propwash fluttered snow-white hair! His face was dead white, one eye glaring at the Comet malignantly, the other covered by a black patch. The fellow was a giant, his great torso projecting high above the cowling!

Then the light flickered off, and a booming roar of malicious laughter floated back as the Fokker faded into the night. The Yank whirled in pursuit. But a glance at the quivering needle of his fuel gauge changed his mind.

Instead he eased the battered Spad into a shallow glide. There must be a squadron field near by, from which those poor devils of Yanks had come to defend the dump.

In another moment he found it, slanted in for a fast landing. A smouldering fire was dying out at the edge of the tarmac and a group of men were huddled in the rain about a dark form on the ground.

A tall officer stepped from the group as the Comet strode up, his hand resting on a holstered Colt.

"Who are you?" the stranger snapped quickly.

"Captain Jackson, from D.H.Q." the Comet returned quietly. "I saw the destruction of the dump, and wanted to clear up a few things."

"So you're the Comet!" the tall man's voice held relief and a trace of awe. "I'm Lieutenant Graham, S.C. of this outfit.

Speaking of clearing things up, take a look at this."

The Comet stepped forward, stared down into the face of the dead man on the ground.

"A Negro?" he asked, in quick astonishment. "First colored flyer I ever saw!"

He stared again at the coal black features of the flyer victim. Then the slow words of Graham fell like blows upon his ears.

"No, not a Negro," the S.C. said harshly, fighting to keep horror from his voice. "Fifteen minutes ago Benton, here, was as white-skinned as you or I!"

"My God, man, what are you saying?" the Virginian gasped.

Simultaneously a car rolled upon the tarmac, stopping a few feet away. Two men helped the driver lift a limp figure from the tonneau. Graham took one look, then his voice broke shrilly.

"Great God! It's Jimmy Anderson—black as a nigger!"

The Comet's brain reeled with horror as for the second time he looked into dead features as black as ink! He clutched the shoulder of the squadron M.O., who was superintending the removal of the two bodies.

"Give those men a quick examination, find out what killed them!" he rasped, "and snap into it!"

The young lieutenant had raced into the operations office. Jackson followed, found the S.C. at the telephone. After a few moments he hung up the receiver.

"A dozen men dead at the dump," he said harshly, "men not killed by the explosions and fire, but black as ink! And thirteen of my pilots—" his voice broke.

When the M.O. came in a few moments later, his eyes were bulging in near panic.

"We stripped those pilots, and their entire bodies are black!"

"But what killed them?" ripped out the Yank ace.

"I don't know! Anderson had two minor bullet wounds, neither of which could have caused his death."

"Could it have been gas?"

"Impossible," the M.O. snapped positively, "nothing wrong with their lungs, I'm sure. And besides, gas wouldn't turn them black; might discolor their faces, but not their entire bodies!"

"I know," the Comet jerked.

He whirled, snatched up the telephone. Before he could use it two grease monkeys staggered into the office with the body of a man dressed in Boche flying outfit.

"The pilot of the Fokker that was shot down before the dump was bombed," one of the ground men volunteered, "but will you look at the guy, sir!"

The Comet bent over the dead German, stared blankly for a moment. The man was an albino! White skin, pink eyes, white hair! The Yank's mind flashed back to the giant, white-haired Boche with whom he had duelled. He had been an albino, too!

The Virginian jerked up the phone, snapped a name to the switchboard operator. A moment later: "Hello, General Halleck?"

In terse sentences he reported the macabre events of the afternoon and early evening.

"There's something ghastly behind this thing, general," he barked, "something big. I'm going across the lines now. I've a hunch the answer to this is somewhere in St. Lorraine; this is what Z-11 tried to warn us about!"

A SPAD hurled itself across that drome of the dead and climbed into the night sky as the Comet eased back the stick. The Southerner's mind was churning as he set a course toward the lines. Albinos, dead men who looked like Negroes, doom lurking in a gloomy sky!

Where did the answer to the ghastly puzzle lay?

The Comet didn't know, but his thoughts kept returning to that new drome in Germany, and that mysterious huge building. Somehow, he felt sure that there was a connection. If ever failure meant ruin, now was that time, for until this horrible menace was solved, Yank ammo dumps were at the mercy of the enemy, and with a drive scheduled soon—his lean jaw set harshly. Somehow, he had to come through!

Instinctively he crossed the lines high. Archie evidently wasn't expecting visitors in this weather, or else the drone of the Hisso failed to carry to the earth. At any rate, the Spad roared over the mud-filled trenches unmolested. The Yank ace swung far to the south of the new Boche drome, then cut back. With a sudden grim decision the Comet cut the throttle, eased the swift little ship down.

A highway choked with trucks and marching men drifted under him as he peered overside, searching for that busy side road that led to the dump. The brief flare of truck exhausts finally marked it for him. He reached over, cut the motor entirely, nosed down for a deadstick landing.

A narrow patch of rough ground between two strips of woods leaped up at him. The next moment the Spad struck heavily, skidded, brought up with a soft thud against a tree trunk.

The Comet clambered out. One glance showing him that he could never take that Spad off again. Landing gear and one wing were washed out, but he had expected that or worse. With a shrug he stood for a moment listening. But evidently the slight noise of the Spad's landing had passed unheard. After a moment he struck out toward the side road.

The muffled chug of motors guided him and in less than a half hour he crouched

near the road, watching as truck after truck loaded with men lurched past.

It was fifteen minutes before the thing he was waiting for happened. One of the heavy camions mired down in the muddy ruts and in response to a growled request from the driver a dozen men piled out to push.

In the darkness men pushed, slipped, and cursed in guttural German. At last the wheels gripped, the truck started to move. One of the Boche soldiers had stepped to the edge of the road and was making a vain effort to dig some of the clinging mud from his boots.

When he saw the truck starting on without him, he cried out a plea to wait. His first cry went unheard, and his second died in his throat as ten sinewy fingers closed around his windpipe.

A moment later the Comet rose from the shadows attired in the dirty uniform of a Boche infantryman. The muffled chug of a motor sounded through the gloom and the Yank stepped boldly into the road. The driver pulled up, cursing.

"I slipped off the truck ahead, *mein Freund*," the Yank said in perfect German. "Let me climb in this one."

"*Macht schnell*, then," the driver growled, "I have to haul workmen to the laboratory all night and day; I can't wait for every *Dummkopf* who falls off!"

The Comet climbed in the rear of the camion, his nerves tensed. Would the fellow he had choked into unconsciousness be missed? He doubted it, for his guess was that these workmen were being hastily recruited from various infantry units. The absence of one unimportant German private and the substitution of another might easily be un-noticed in the darkness.

A few moments of monotonous jolting, then the truck drew up on the tarmac and the workmen were gruffly ordered out. The Comet had no sooner set foot on the

ground than he gasped in amazement. The doors of the long shed at the end of the factory were open, and a long, silvery shape was slowly emerging into the night. A Zeppelin!

A few minutes of efficient work and the Zep was moored to a tower near the huge shed. Men by the score were swarming around it, everywhere was bustling activity.

An important *Feldwebel* strutted up, delivered orders pompously. The detachment marched off toward the Zeppelin, the Comet among them. As he neared the huge dirigible the Yank suddenly jerked back. A huge man was directing the work of loading innumerable sacks into the Zep; a man with white hair and skin, pink eyes!

The albino he had scrapped with over Perrincourt! The man's mocking laughter still seemed to ring in his ears. An *Oberleutnant* ran up to the albino giant, saluted respectfully.

"Herr Count von Hauser, the Number One compartment is loaded."

"Gut!" growled the one-eyed giant, swinging on the new detachment. "You men take the place of these others. Work, you *Schwein*, work! This ship must be loaded in half an hour!"

The Comet took his place near one of the trucks loaded with sacks, began to help pass them to others. Cables extended from the Zep and swiftly the mysterious sacks were hauled upward to disappear into the vast belly of the air raider.

A Boche dressed in the naval uniform worn by Zeppelin crews attached the sacks to the cables. Suddenly the fellow staggered back, screaming with fear, his hands pressed to his face.

"A sack has torn open," someone screamed, "help Hans!"

"A couple of you men take him to the hospital," the little *Feldwebel* ordered.

The Comet sprang forward, but two others were before him. They led the fear-

crazed Hans away as the Yank watched with narrowed eyes. Of what was the fellow afraid? What was in the sacks?

At that moment a small group of pilots passed the workers. The Virginian's body tensed. All of the Boches were albinos! A pink-eyed staffel! What possible connection could albinos have with the terrible black death?

As the Comet covertly watched, the Mercedes in two Fokkers were started, and the ships taxied under the swaying Zep. A long steel cable that terminated in a hook reached down, was fastened into a rigid ring mounted over the Fokkers' center sections. In a moment the two empty Fokkers were hoisted upward and maneuvered until they hung suspended from rigid hooks protruding from the belly of the Zep on port and starboard. The Mercedes were left clicking over slowly.

THE remaining albino pilots moved impatiently toward Fokkers which stood warming on the line. A sudden thought flashed into the Yank's brain and instantly he went into action. Watching his chance he slipped away from the busy loaders and hurried toward the small building to which the unlucky Hans had been led.

As he entered the little hospital, a kind-faced German medico looked up questioningly.

"Was ist?"

"Der Kommander sent me to see if Hans will be able to take his post in the Zeppelin. They are nearly ready to take off."

"You mean Hans Metz, the gunner? Nein, he should not go."

As the doctor stepped back the Comet saw that the unfortunate Hans was lying on a table where the doctor had been engaged in bandaging his face.

"Das ist too bad," murmured the Comet. "Herr Doktor, I know you are busy; I

shall be glad to finish bandaging the poor fellow."

"Well," the doctor said gratefully, "I have other patients who need attention. *Danke.*"

He turned and hurried from the room. The Comet stepped to the side of Hans Metz. A Luger appeared in his hand as if by magic.

"You!" he snapped, "change uniforms with me, quickly!"

Hans Metz made a quick movement toward his hip pocket. But the Yank was quicker. His fist swung in a short, vicious arc. The Boche air sailor slumped back with a muffled groan.

Working with desperate speed for the second time that night the Comet changed uniforms with a German. When he had finished he ripped bandages from a roll and wound them tightly about his face. As an after thought he slipped into his pocket the jar of salve with which the doctor had evidently dressed the German's face.

A moment later he was racing across the tarmac toward the mooring mast. The two idling Fokkers still hung suspended beneath the raider's belly.

The last of the Zep's crew were mounting the ladder in the mooring mast as the Comet reached the base of the tower. At the hatchway in the Zeppelin's nose a hard-face *Unteroffizier* stared suspiciously at the Yank's muffled face.

"Hans Metz," the Comet mumbled behind the bandages, "the *Doktor* said I am fit for duty."

"To your post, then, careless dog! This rain may cease at any moment, and everything would be a failure."

Puzzled, the Yank clambered upon the narrow catwalk. What had the rain to do with the success or failure of the Zep's raid? But there was no time to spend in conjecture; he must find his post without arousing suspicion. If the real Hans Metz should be discovered—the Comet

shivered, wondering if there was a wireless sending outfit back at the mystery drome.

Chancing everything on one bold move the intrepid American followed the *Unteroffizier* down to the port engine gondola. There was a Lanz gun there, untended. With his hand close to the butt of his Luger the Comet stationed himself by the gun, looked cautiously around.

No one paid him the slightest attention; evidently this was either Metz's post or else in the confusion of taking off no one had time to consider him. The engineer glanced curiously at his bandaged face, but said nothing.

The American ace knew now that the Zep was boring through the night at top speed. The mighty roar of the Maybach engine in the gondola proved that.

He glanced again from the gun port. The empty Fokkers hung not far beneath him, props idling lazily. Then past the Zep roared the unmistakable shape of a fast flying Fokker. The single-seater escort, piloted by the albino Boches!

On a sudden impulse the Comet turned and climbed from the engine room toward the main control gondola. Here the giant Count von Hauser would be, and here was the only chance he had of learning the raider's destination.

In the control gondola half a dozen officers were grouped about instruments and maps, conversing in excited gutturals. Head and shoulders above the others, Count von Hauser loomed like a monster from some other world. He whirled as the Comet slipped into the room.

"*Was ist, Schwein?*"

The ammunition for the port Lanz gun, *Herr* Count. It is not sufficient," the American faltered respectfully.

"Fool!" the giant albino thundered, his single pink eye glaring with rage, "You know we have cut down all available weight, in order to carry this load. Get

back to your station; the Fokkers will protect us!"

The Comet muttered apologetically and backed toward the door. But as von Hauser turned back toward the others the Yank ace halted, listening intently. The Boches were tense now, too, peering toward the dark, rain-swept earth.

"We must be nearly over Le Moreau," van Hauser snapped.

He stepped to an open port, a signal pistol in his hand. The next moment a green light arced into the night.

None of the engrossed Boches noticed the Comet's suddenly set face. Le Moreau! Location of the largest American ammo dump in the sector! A vital part of the Yanks' attack plans!

Then the scream of diving motors cut through the deep throb of the supercharged Maybachs. A half dozen plummeting shapes hurtled toward the dark earth.

"The decoy Fokkers go down!" snarled von Hauser. "Already the *verdammte* Yankee flyers will be in the air, ready to protect the dump. But when the Fokkers have engaged them—we shall strike!"

The door from the tiny wireless cubicle smashed open, as an excited Boche darted into the room.

"*Excellenz!*" he shouted, "message from the drome! Gunner Hans Metz has just been discovered unconscious; his uniform gone!"

"**GOTT!**" jerked von Hauser. "A spy! A Yankee *schwein* is aboard!" The giant albino whirled, tugging at his holstered gun just as the Comet rose from his crouching position. For a moment swift death stared the American in the face. The German's automatic was already in his hand; no time for the Comet to draw his own.

Instinctively the Yank ace's hand closed

upon the nearest object—a small bronze figure of the Kaiser perched for a good luck piece above the bomb toggles. With all his strength he flung the image at the pink-eyed face swimming before him.

Even as the Luger exploded the heavy piece of bronze crashed full into the giant's face.

Blam! Blam! Blam! As rapidly as he could pull the trigger the Yank poured bullets. The Boches wilted grotesquely over the gun as the Comet jerked open the floor hatchway and peered for a split-second downward. As he had hoped, a rope ladder dangled down to the cockpit of the port Fokker.

With desperate haste he swarmed down the swaying ladder.

Then he was in the cockpit of the Fokker, hand clutching frantically for the throttle.

In a second the stick came back, the Comet goosed the Mercedes savagely. Only a master pilot could hope to lift the Fokker from the hook without crashing the Zep's belly. But the Comet brought to bear every atom of skill he had gleaned from a hundred savage combats.

With a swift zooming rush the blast of the Mercedes lifted the Fokker from the hook. Instantly the Comet slammed stick forward. For a terrible second the Zep's dark belly loomed like a mountain of doom directly in front of him, then the air foils gripped and the Fokker dived away.

Vaguely the Comet was aware that the remaining Fokker was jerking from its hook. At the same moment a dark cloud seemed to begin to form above him. At that split-second something clicked in the American's brain; the mystery began to fall into understandable pattern. And instantly he knew that unless he kept above the Zep, above that dark cloud ominously forming above him, he was doomed to a terrible death.

As he zoomed the Fokker skyward with desperate haste, the Comet realized with a sudden shock that the loginess of the ships could be due to but one thing—both the Fokkers were heavily loaded with bombs!

His thoughts flashed back to the six decoy Fokkers that had flashed down to take on the Yank defense planes. A quick side glimpse showed tiny dashes of flame a mile to the south, and thousands of feet lower. Evidently the crew of the Zep saw the battle also, for the big raider altered her course, swinging toward the distant dogfight. And always that ominous cloud grew and grew beneath the Zep's nose.

Face dripping sweat, stung by the lashing drive of rain, the Comet coaxed the Fokker to its absolute ceiling. He found above and behind the raider. Tac-tac-tac-tac! Spandau fire crackled from behind him; the other Fokker was swinging to the attack.

The Comet ignored this new danger, cuffing the Fokker's nose down. A long burst ripped from the twin Spandaus, pattered like vicious hail against the Zep's stern. Answering fire snarled back. The Comet's ship jerked as he flung another burst into the lumbering Zep. Now he knew that the fate of the huge Yank dump rested his keeping that silvery shape from overhead. If he failed—men beneath, men flying American defense planes and men on the ground would die, die horribly with their skin black as negroes!

A dark shape ripped past. The Yank caught a flashing glimpse of flying white hair tossing in the wind. Count von Hauser himself was the pilot!

Then for a few hell-filled moments that dreary night turned into a livid inferno for the lone Yank ace. From every side a crashing hail of screaming bullets seemed to envelope the laboring Fokker.

Only the fact that both Zep and the

albino's Fokker were too heavily loaded for fast maneuvering made it possible for the Comet to survive for even a moment.

Once the crate skidded, avoiding the edge of the black cloud issuing from the dirigible by scant feet. Death grinned then, briefly, in the American's face before he hauled the wobbling Fokker away.

And in that moment the only possible hope of victory came to the Comet's reeling brain. Throwing a superhuman skill and judgment into his efforts the Virginian literally dragged the Fokker scraping across the Zeppelin's rounded back. And in that fraction of a second the Comet jerked the toggle that released the Fokker's bombs!

A monstrous hand lifted the Fokker, flung it swirling a hundred feet. A gargantuan booming roar smote the Yank's aching ears. Blinding glare of horrible flame engulfed his reeling vision. All that as the silver air raider burst into a million fragments.

One flashing glimpse of a battered Fokker fleeing toward Germany's lines, of a giant figure shaking a vengeful fist in the air. Then strange, throbbing peace descended upon the night.

AN HOUR later the Comet sat at a table in D.H.Q. while an M.O. bandaged his aching body and General Halleck shot excited questions at him.

"These men who died, whose skins turned black—the albinos you phoned me about—in God's name, man what was it?"

"An ingenious Boche scheme based on a very simple thing," said the Comet slowly, "and I was as much in the dark as anybody until I picked up a bronze statuette of the Kaiser to throw at Count von Hauser!"

"General, did you ever hear the story about the boy in ancient Greece who was entirely covered with bronze? He died;

remember? The doctors then discovered that if the human body is completely covered with any paint-like substance the person will die. And that was the trick."

"That factory?" asked the general incredulously.

The Comet nodded.

"That's where the powder was made. The Zep was loaded with the stuff so that it could be discharged through big pipes beneath the gas bag. The powder had to be wet to be efficient, therefore a rainy night was picked for the big trial. The decoy Fokkers were to engage the American defense planes while the Zep discharged its load high above. When the cloud of powder descended, mixed with rain, the Yank pilots were quickly covered with the mixture, and died.

"That's what happened at the dump at Perrincourt this afternoon. Then after the defense ships were downed, two heavily loaded Fokkers were to drop from the Zep and bomb the dump. The Zep itself, of course, didn't dare descent low enough to do any bombing itself, for the anti-aircraft guns would have made hash of a target that large.

"You must realize, general, that these dumps were defended by entire squadrons of planes and batteries of archie. Ordinary bombing methods wouldn't work here; the defense had to be wiped out first."

"You must be right," sighed the staff officer, "but I still don't get it all. For in-

stance: the powder and rain would only strike the pilots' faces; their clothes covered the rest of their bodies."

"That didn't matter," the ace from Virginia drawled, "you see, I did a little experimenting around the wreck of the Zep and one of the crashed Fokkers before I came here to report. I found that the mixture penetrates cloth and leather easily. Moreover, when it strikes it spreads rapidly."

"But what about the albinos?"

"That was one of the cleverest parts of von Hauser's scheme," the Comet said quietly, "you see, an albino has no color pigment in his eyes, skin, or hair. As a result, with no pigment to protect the iris of the eye from light, albinos can see but poorly in the daytime. But their night sight is excellent. These albino pilots could see like cats in the dark! Also their skin is thicker than an ordinary person's, especially the inner layer. Consequently it took a considerable length of time for the dye to harm them. Once back at their drome, their M.O. had a salve that would remove the dye if used in time. To make sure, the pilots wore flexible suits of asbestos, one substance the dye couldn't penetrate. You know," the Comet finished thoughtfully, "I've a hunch that albino Count and I will meet again!"

"If you do," laughed General Halleck, "better be careful; I'd hate to see you stretched out looking like a darky corpse!"

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Satan's Twins

by WILLIAM E. POINDEXTER

Man to man, they were buddies; as enemies, they hated each other. And now they flew into battle skies, two fighting eagles who knew that before the night was through, one of them must kill the other!

He fired one mad shot before the other leaped.



HARRY GRANT tried to think of a prayer as the Fokker came smashing in at him, but he couldn't, so he swore savagely instead.

His finger-nails tore away as he plucked frantically at the jammed mechanism of his Vickers. Spandau lead was rattling against the cowling of the Spad and ricocheting past his head. Harry's lips drew back in a grimace of defiance at the death which he could not avoid.

Then another Spad was coming down from nowhere, smashing straight between the Fokker and Grant's ship. The German reeled in a desperate effort to avoid a collision. His tail-assembly clicked against the newcomer's wing-tip.

The Spad went lurching down its pilot fighting the controls coolly. One wing was crumpled for half its length. For a moment Harry believed he would make a landing in safe territory, but the ship veered crazily to come down between the lines in No-Man's-Land. It struck, and Grant, following anxiously, saw it nose over with a rending crash into a shell-crater. But it did not burn, and Harry knew there was a slim chance that the pilot had lived.

No matter what the risk to himself, he had to find out. Dan Prentiss was the best friend he had ever had, and this was the second time that Dan had saved his life at the risk of his own. He scanned the ground carefully as he swept over. He believed he could land safely. Getting away again was something else, but he wouldn't worry about that until he came to it.

He put the Spad down gently, avoided a shell-hole by ruddering violently, and the ship came to rest a few yards from the wreck, the Hisso ticking idly. As rifle bullets from the German trenches flicked past his head, he dived from the cockpit. Dan Prentiss had been flung clear of his

plane and was lying motionless on the ground. Driving forward in a zigzag run, Harry snatched up the man and rolled head over heels into a crater with him.

When Harry sat up, he saw that Dan's eyes were open, but there was a blank, unseeing light in them. There was a black bruise on the side of his head, but otherwise he did not seem to be seriously injured.

"You're okay, fella," Harry grinned. "Can't hurt a flyer by bashing in his head."

Dan mumbled for a moment and then spoke distinctly, although he was out of his head.

"Rail-head and ammo depot at Mezières—Gotha raid—just before dark—" His voice again trailed off into silence.

Harry started violently, for the words were spoken in pure German without an accent!

"First time I ever knew a guy could learn German by being spilled on his head," he muttered, then bent over Dan in sudden grimness, exploring his pockets.

Something crackled in the lining of the man's tunic, and Harry ripped it out. He stared at the betraying paper with sick incredulity, and when he looked up, Dan was gazing at him with the light of reason returning to his eyes.

"I came down between the lines, didn't I?" Dan asked. "And you risked your neck to come down after me?" His eyes were suddenly soft. "You would do a damned fool thing like that, kid."

For a moment Harry choked with the bitterness that rose within him, then he put the paper carefully in his pocket.

"Yes," he said harshly, "I thought I was coming down to a friend, only to find that he's a lousy traitor instead!"

The man who had called himself Dan Prentiss drew himself painfully into a sitting position, and regarded the other steadily, without anger or surprise.

"So you know," he said without attempt at evasion. "And yet, you're wrong. Oh, I know that paper damns me utterly, so there's no use lying to you, but I'm not a traitor. I'm a German, Harry, doing a dirty but necessary job the best I know how in an effort to serve my country. I—I hoped you'd never know. I hoped that I could just disappear some day when my work was finished, and you'd think I'd been shot down."

Harry nodded somberly.

"I see it all now. That's why you never fought if you could help it, but insisted on doing observation work."

Prentiss smiled.

"And my observation reports were just sufficiently inaccurate to make them of no value, while I was able to give information to my countrymen. Well, that's finished now, and I don't know that I'm sorry. Still, there are pleasanter ways to die than with your back to a stone wall."

Harry flinched as if he had been smashed in the face. For months the two men had been firm friends. In the chaos of a world gone mad with the lust to kill, Harry had clung to that friendship as the one precious thing in his life. And on two occasions Prentiss had saved his life at the risk of his own. And now, duty demanded that he turn his best friend over to a firing-squad.

"The hell with it!" he ripped out savagely, jerking the paper from his pocket and crumpling it in his hand as if he would tear it to fragments. Then he paused.

"I'll feel like a murderer the rest of my life," he said hoarsely, "but I've got to do it. Dan, can't you see that I've got to do it? I owe you my life twice over, and yet I've got to turn you over to a firing-squad!"

The German's eyes were a little wistful, but they were steady and understanding.

"Sure, kid," he agreed. "Between duty

to your country and personal friendship, there can be no choice. I took my chances and lost, so I have nothing to kick about. But I just want you to know, Harry, that our friendship has meant as much to me as it has to you. Well, *c'est la guerre*, as our French friends say, and to hell with it. But I warn you that I'm not giving in without a scrap. If I have a chance to escape, I'll take it, and it looks as if my chances were as good as yours right now."

"Listen, Dan," Harry said slowly, "what's this about the rail-head and supply dump being blown up? That dump on the head made you spill things. You said it was at dusk—tomorrow, eh?"

Dan's eyes flickered momentarily. "Tomorrow, yes," he said.

"Which means, of course, that it's today," Harry said coolly, and glanced at his wrist watch. His face went a shade whiter. He knew the importance of that depot. Supplies had been moved in secretly, and a raid now would destroy invaluable materials and cripple Allied activities at that point.

He calculated swiftly. The sun had already set and it would soon be dark. Too late to get back to the field and give the warning. By the time ships could be warmed and take the air, it would be over. The Germans could make a swift dash across the lines, lay their eggs of destruction, and be off again with little danger to themselves.

Torn between duty and friendship, there could be but one choice, yet there was a strange light in his slitted eyes as he turned to the other man who had been watching him closely.

"Dan," he said steadily, "you and I have ridden the skies with each other for many months. We're riding together again for the last time. I've got to stop that raid, and you're going with me on the wing of my bus. After that—"

Dan thrust his hand into his tunic, and when it came away there was a small automatic in it. But there was only grief and pain in his eyes.

"No, Harry, you're staying right here until after the raid. I've given the word for the attack, and it's going through. But there's more to it than that. The bombers will be escorted and you wouldn't have a chance of stopping them. I'm saving your life by keeping you here."

Harry smiled grimly. Somehow he didn't care what happened to him now, but he had to play the game as he saw it, and he had to save that rail-head. Without a word he began to crawl toward Dan, staring straight into the muzzle of the automatic.

"Kill me, Dan—kill me if you can," he said softly, "for as sure as hell I'm taking you back with me."

He saw Dan's finger tighten on the trigger, but just before the gun roared, he saw the muzzle drop from the center of his forehead to his shoulder. He twisted sidewise and the bullet seared his arm. His fist shot out, snapping Dan's head back as if his neck had been broken. The other man collapsed limply.

"Got to play the game as I see it, Dan," he muttered as he picked up the automatic and thrust it into his own pocket. He couldn't leave the man there to escape and continue his spying at some other point. Perhaps they would both die in the attempt to save the rail-head, and if so, he would be content with that. But God, if there had only been some way that he could be loyal to both duty and friendship. But there was no middle ground.

There was no time to be lost, and he stuck his head cautiously over the edge of the shell-hole. Instantly a Maxim chattered, and bullets showered him with dirt. But the plane had stopped in a slight depression and was partly shielded from

the German lines. If he could reach it, there was a possibility that he could manage a take-off before they got him.

Carefully he lifted Dan and flung the limp body over his shoulder. He ducked out of the hole and reeled forward in a staggering run, falling heavily into the depression by the side of the ship. The motor was still idling, but with bullets whining past, it was only a question of time before the Spad was disabled. Working swiftly with his and Dan's belts, he tied the unconscious man firmly to the wing, then straddled in behind the stick, bent low, and jerked the throttle wide.

At the same instant a German 88 thundered over, struck nearby with a rending concussion, and the Spad lurched wildly, threatening to tear off a wing as it dragged the ground. Rudderless desperately, Harry straightened her out, his eyes glaring straight ahead in an effort to pick a path over the torn ground. Bullets battered the fuselage and his head jerked back agonizedly as hot lead raked his temple. But an instant later he pulled back on the stick and the Spad took the air in a twisting zoom and thundered over the tree-tops.

Time was growing short. Anxiously he batted the throttle wide open, gunning the Hisso to a roaring, hammering drive, leaning forward tensely as if he would push her on to extra speed by sheer force of will. He could still make it if the Germans were not ahead of time. He hoped that they would arrive while there was still light enough for accurate shooting. He would need all the breaks he could get.

He attempted to plan his campaign, but realized the uselessness of that. All he could do was to trust to luck and fight like hell. The best he could expect was that there would be one bomber and two escort ships, perhaps more. It was a suicide flight, he knew, but at least he would

go down fighting. He searched the darkening sky anxiously for Allied planes that he might call to his assistance, but the air was deserted.

He knew that the bomber would come in high, so he reached for altitude until he was flying close against a ceiling of clouds at more than twelve thousand feet. It was still light there, although the ground was darkening to a blur below him. And then he remembered that his guns were jammed. Swearing softly to himself, he steadied the stick between his knees and began picking at the jammed cartridge with his knife. It came away and he tried a short testing burst. The guns were now working perfectly.

Glancing over at the wing, he saw that Dan was conscious again, staring at him with expressionless eyes. Harry grinned twistedly. It was impossible for him to think of the man as an enemy. Dan was still his friend, the friend who had saved his life on two separate occasions. No, three. For Dan, who could have killed him back there in the shell-hole, had deliberately lowered the automatic to aim at his shoulder in an effort to disable him. And yet, if he lived, he must take Dan back to face a firing-squad, or he himself would be a traitor.

But there was no use thinking of that now. Presently he knew from the contours of the horizon that the rail-head and supply dump lay just beneath him, and he began to circle at cruising speed. And that was the hardest part of the whole job—waiting. His thoughts continued to revert to Dan. Those months of comradeship could not be wiped out in a moment.

He strained his eyes about the horizon, but a black curtain was being drawn over the world. Perhaps, since the Germans were coming after dark, they would not be escorted. But he did not care now as long as they came quickly and ended the

unbearable strain that was drawing his nerves to the snapping point.

Something swished past him, felt rather than seen. It came and went, ghost-like in the darkness. A Gotha! He swept about in a twisting bank, putting the nose of the Spad down like a hound on a dim trail. An instant later he felt a pounding vibration up the back of the fuselage—the Gotha had been escorted, after all. He had evidently been betrayed to the German by his exhaust flames.

But he was intent only on finding the Gotha. A moment's delay might mean the difference between victory and defeat. He was forced to pull up, however, as bullets smashed into the shock-pad at the back of his head. He veered out of range, but now he had no idea of the direction in which the bomber had gone.

Circling frantically, he felt the Spad lurch slightly, but forgot it as a tiny flash of fire sprang up from the ground more than two miles below. He knew that it was caused by a German bomb, but released his breath in a gusty sigh of relief when he saw that it had struck wide of its objective.

He dived in that direction, but it was a game of blind-man's buff, with death to the loser. Just at that moment a searchlight poked its ghostly white finger into the sky, sweeping about frantically, and presently, like a great silver moth, a Gotha was caught in the beam.

With a yell of triumph, Harry went smashing in for the kill. The bomber was twisting and diving ponderously in an effort to escape the light, and shells from an archie battery were mashing up about her. Into the hell of bursting shells Harry flung his Spad, with tracers from his Vickers raking the big plane from props to tail.

Instantly she reeled over on a wing-tip, and a little red tongue of flame licked back toward the cockpits. It flickered, then

sprang up again, suddenly enveloping the entire ship, and she went roaring down to flaming destruction.

Harry circled dazedly. It had been easy, too easy. One short burst had destroyed the enemy, without a shot being fired in return. Then he started convulsively. Again pin-points of light had leaped up from the ground. One! Two! Three! He swore in concentrated fury and gunned the Spad about. There was another bomber in the air, but again she had scored a miss. It would be blind luck if he located the second Gotha in time.

Again the searchlight was quartering the black curtain of the sky, but without success. Again Harry was puzzled to feel the Spad lurch slightly. He seemed to feel unknown menace and danger at his side, and the hair at the back of his neck prickled. He turned his head, but could see nothing. He might have been flying far out in interstellar space, except for that white beam of light that searched and probed desperately.

Then something touched his shoulder. It was like a ghostly hand reaching out of the upper sky. He laughed shortly as he remembered Dan Prentiss. Somehow Dan had managed to work himself free and was now bending over him. But he set his teeth and searched the air for betraying exhaust flames that would give him his chance to finish the job.

Suddenly he felt Dan's lips against his ear.

"Turn back, kid," Dan yelled. "Don't make me have to kill you—don't make a murderer out of me, Harry!" There was agony in Dan's voice, but there was grim determination there, too.

Harry made no reply. He thought he saw a flicker of flame to his left, and he gunned in that direction. He fired blindly, his guns bucking on their mountings, their muzzles wreathed in fire. Instantly red spurts of flame stabbed back at him and

he ripped in, heedless of the unseen death that screamed past him. He was blasting in to point-blank range when an arm encircled his neck, jerking him backward and causing him to pull the ship around in a skidding bank.

Again Dan's voice reached his ears through the throbbing of the Hisso.

"Pull out, Harry, or this is your finish. Remember, my life is forfeit anyway, and I'd just as soon wash out like this. Better than a firing-squad. I don't want to kill you, but I'm fighting for my country just as you're fighting for yours. It's my job to see that that rail-head is destroyed."

"And mine to see that it isn't!" Harry grated. In sheer desperation he raised his arm and struck backward fiercely. At the same instant the searchlight swept over and centered on the Spad. In the glaring white light, Harry saw Dan go staggering and reeling back, his face contorted. A slight dip of the right wing, and he could have hurled Dan out into the blackness. But in spite of himself he dipped the left wing, and Dan was flung back, wrapping his arms about a strut and clinging tenaciously.

A tortured laugh broke from Harry's lips at the wierd situation. Each of them was fighting frantically to win, to do the job he had set out to do. They were the indomitable breed of men who must fight to the finish no matter what the odds. Yet neither of them could quite forget the human equation that entered into the struggle. Neither could forget that they had been comrades.

But again Harry forgot the man on the wing as he attempted to get out of the revealing glare of the searchlight. Evidently the operator below believed him to be an enemy, for the light followed his every move. He dived and zoomed desperately, but always that light followed him, revealing him to his enemies while leaving them in the safety of the darkness.

The Gotha could have accomplished her purpose of destruction while the light held Harry helpless, but instead, the Germans elected to destroy him. Tracers lanced out at him, but he could not tell from which direction. Then a Fokker flashed into the line of light, swept him with a deadly burst of bullets and was gone into the blackness again before he could line his sights.

One of those bullets had raked along Harry's head; he jerked limply back in his seat, his hand falling helplessly from the stick. He was not unconscious, but he was paralyzed—unable to move, as the Spad thundered into a flat spin. Grimly, by sheer force of will, he attempted to return his hand to the stick, but could not, and bullets were lashing the Spad at almost point-blank range. His head rolled, and he turned tortured eyes to see Dan staring at him strangely. Someway, his lips twisted into a grin, and it was more than the German could stand.

Not with any intention of aiding Harry in the battle, but to save a friend, Dan lunged suddenly forward, grasped the stick, and slammed it to one side. The Spad went reeling out of the beam of light, still spinning, but that momentary respite had given the Yank the chance to recover somewhat. He straightened in the seat, fighting for the controls. And again the grim, deadly humor of the situation swept over him.

He kicked the Spad out of the spin and saw, with exultation, that the searchlight had at last centered on the Gotha. She was about five hundred feet below him, and he knew that she must be almost directly over the rail-head. He knew that one bomb planted squarely in the ammo dump would destroy the whole thing. But he also realized that while Dan had again saved his life, the man would nevertheless kill him rather than permit him to down that Gotha.

But he could not, dared not, let anything stop him now. He became suddenly conscious that the moon was coming up, and he could see the faint blur of Dan's body crouching there on the wing, moving closer to him. As he glanced around, he could see a Fokker reeling down upon him.

He slammed the stick forward, at the same time jerking the automatic from his pocket.

"Stay back, Dan!" he yelled, but Dan continued to creep forward along the wing, slowly, determinedly, intent upon sending them both to their deaths, rather than fail in his duty.

They were going down in a screaming dive, with the Fokker coming in on their tail, and Dan was almost blown from the wing by the fury of the wind that swept past him.

"For God's sake, keep out of it, Dan," Harry yelled again in desperation. "It won't help matters to make me shoot you off the wing!" But Dan came on and on, regarding the pistol no more than if it had been a toy, while the Fokker blasted at them from the rear and the Gotha was just beneath them. He could see that the Germans were ready to release the remaining bombs, and this time they would not miss.

What happened next was a nightmare. As he dived into the light which still held the Gotha, he knew that archie shells were smashing about him. One of them burst so close that the ship shivered to the concussion, and smoking shards slashed through the wing-fabric.

Then Dan was leaping at him. He fired one wild shot before the man was upon him, trying to pin his arms to his sides. He fought desperately. Smashing savagely at Dan's face with the pistol, he managed to release one arm, and slapped his hand against the triggers of his overheated Vickers.

He poured the bullets into the big bomber as the Spad went reeling down the path of tracers, and was answered by a withering fire, while the Fokker behind him blasted furiously. But Dan was hampering his every movement.

Harry saw that he was going to overshoot the Gotha without bringing her down. And with that Fokker riding his tail so relentlessly, he did not think he would ever have another chance at her. But he had come too far along the trail of success to fail now.

Again smashing Dan back, he kicked the rudder and slammed the stick over, ripping straight in at the Gotha for a collision that would mean destruction to all. For death meant little to him now. But the pilot of the Gotha had other ideas. He kicked his plane over in a reeling swoop that almost flung her on her back. It was too late, however. The Spad's under-carriage tore through a wing-tip as if it had been paper. Like a wounded bird, the Gotha went down, the pilot fighting for control.

Instantly Harry yanked back on the stick, the Spad came up in a shuddering zoom, and he drove steel bullets through the belly of the great ship. With gas-tanks punctured, and gas spilling out over hot motors, a sheet of flame swept backward. There was a rending explosion that shivered her to fragments, and the Fokker which was just diving past was caught in that fiery blast before the pilot could sheer off. Badly crippled, she veered downward for a forced landing in Allied territory, her path lighted by a flaming torch that had once been a Gotha.

Weak and shaken, Harry banked his battered ship into the east. He saw that the moon had crept higher over the horizon, flooding the world with pale silver. He glanced over to where Dan was still crouched on the wing. The German's face was drawn and sick with defeat, but he

managed a grin. He looked dazedly about, for Harry was heading for the lines. He pointed back in the direction of the home field, thinking the other had lost the way, but Harry shook his head grimly. He fondled the automatic in his pocket. At least, Dan Prentiss would not die before a firing-squad.

He crossed the lines at nine thousand and was unmolested by anti-aircraft batteries. But when he was over German territory, he went down in a long glide, cutting his motor for a silent landing, searching for a vacant field. The faint moonlight was deceptive, but he brought his ship safely down to a dead-stick landing, and crawled wearily from the cockpit. He knew that there was a German drome nearby, and that he had probably been seen, but he did not hurry. He was sure that the hot motor would start up instantly.

"We've come to the parting of the ways, Dan," he said somberly to the man who confronted him silently, wonderingly. His hand slipped the automatic from his pocket, holding it against his leg where Dan could not see it.

"Kid," Dan said, "this has been the toughest night I've ever experienced. God knows, I've tried to do my duty, and it isn't my fault that I failed. You fought a grand fight. But Harry, you don't mean that you're going to let me go, after all? I want to live, but you understand that if you let me go, I'll continue to serve my country as a spy. That's my job."

"I'm not going to fail in my duty," Harry said dully, "but I can't forget that you've been my friend, that you've saved my life many times over. Dan, turn around."

Wonderingly, the German turned his back. From somewhere not far away, Harry could hear the approach of men, evidently a searching party that had seen the plane make a landing. Yet still he was

in no hurry. He stood there, staring at Dan Prentiss, then the automatic in his hand came up slowly. For an instant his arm shook as if he had the palsy, then it steadied to rock-like firmness.

The pistol cracked sharply in the silence, and Dan reeled sidewise against a tree. He stared at Harry, and the smoking pistol, licked his dry lips.

"I didn't think you'd—shoot me in the back," he said, almost in a whisper. "But—okay, kid. Shoot again, and aim straighter!"

Harry dropped the pistol and leaped forward. He could hear excited voices and saw a light gleaming through the trees. He caught Dan's arm and examined it.

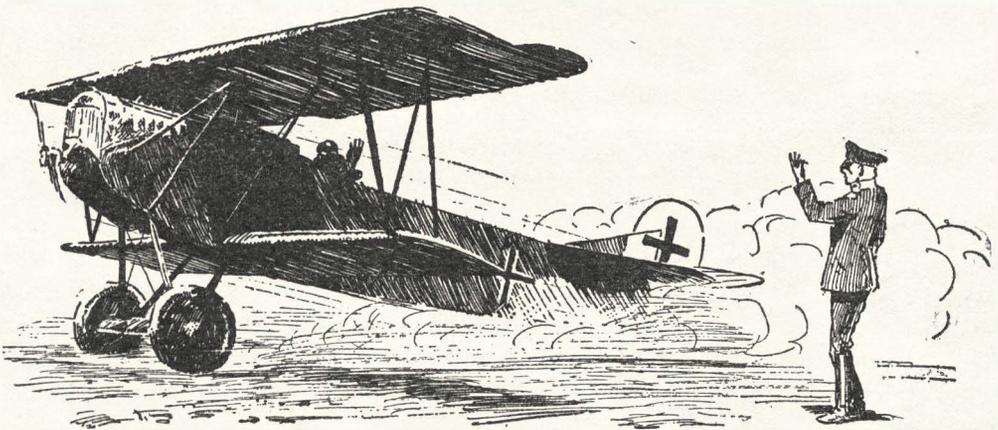
"You damn fool, Dan," he said softly. "I didn't try to kill you. But I splintered

your elbow all to hell. That arm won't be much use to you anymore. Your military service is finished. Dan, do you get that? And you'll never fly a ship again. It means that I've destroyed your usefulness in the army, so that you can never do my country any harm, but at least I give you back your life in payment for my own. It's the best I can do to pay my debt. So—long, Dan!"

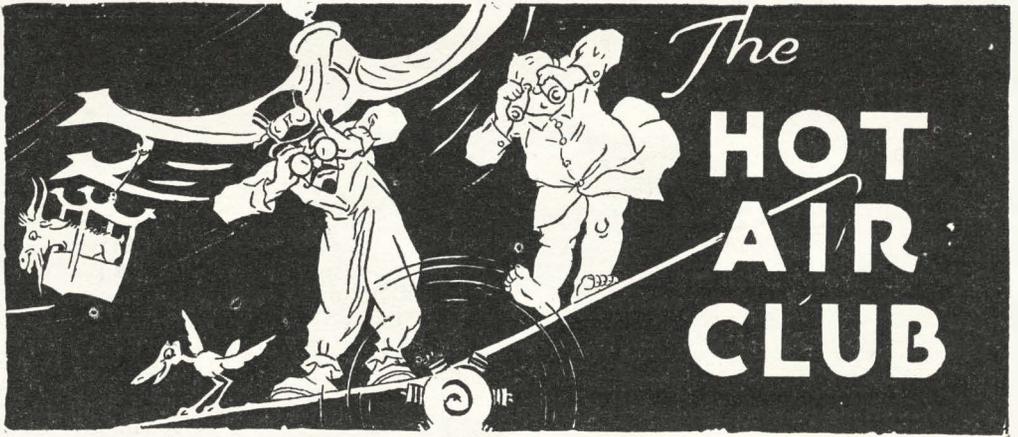
The Germans were very close. Harry turned and whirled the prop of his Spad. The Hisso burst into a stuttering roar, and he straddled into the cockpit, jerking the throttle wide. As the ship roared over the tree-tops, he looked down and saw Dan Prentiss staring up at him.

And remembering that Dan would never fly by his side again, he felt very much alone.

Would you believe it?



DURING the World War, one of the superstitions of the Germans was the manner of saying good-by to a pilot about to take off. An American would have said "S'long, and good luck." Not so the Germans, who considered it fatal to wish a flyer good luck at the beginning of his flight. Their parting wish was "*Hals-und Beinbruch!*" This, would you believe it, was expressing the hope that the pilot would "break his legs and his neck!" The pilot so addressed felt that he would surely return safe and sound.



Conducted by
EUGENE A. CLANCY

ATENTION, you flying land crabs! In calling tonight's meeting to order, I must insist on the most absolute silence in the hall as I am suffering from an old wound in the back of the neck that I received while shooting down enemy planes during the Turkish campaign.

General Pershing himself decorated this wound—I mean, decorated the enemy for inflicting it on me—I mean, that is, decorated me with open palms, but anyway, this wound bothers me whenever I overwork, as I constantly do for the benefit of this lousy war-flying outfit.

I have just come from another all-day conference down at Mike's Place where I have been working furiously for sixteen hours with only a little brandy every ten minutes to sustain my intellect, and this wound is now making me so dizzy that I am able to address you with great difficulty, and if anybody has a little—thanks, lieutenant.

Colonel Houseboat's personal physician is of the opinion that in the hurry of field hospital operations a nurse's wrist-watch or a Turkish can opener was accidentally sewed up in this wound, which causes a boil-like swelling which can only be kept in control by heating the green pigment of the blood by constant interior applica-

tions of Mr. Hennessey's Tonsil Remedy.

But as I was saying, I have just returned from another very interesting trip in Colonel Houseboat's famous secret plane in which he makes overnight flights to all corners of the world on diplomatic missions for the State Department.

The plane, as usual, was navigated by Isaac O'Connor, the great Swedish ace, and we took along our friends, Abdul Benny Smid, the former ex-Sultan of Morocco, and Clarence Hip Lee, the well-known Chinese diplomat. And as usual we had to take along that infernal blond jane who opens my mail, and her boy friend, Count Itchover Pest, that dirty spy she has forced on us.

We made this trip under *sealed orders* which I took from a distinguished messenger in Mike's Place while the colonel was having a diplomatic nap in his easy chair in the telephone booth. These orders were not to be opened until we were at an altitude of thirteen thousand four-hundred and six feet over a certain village in England called Cockney-on-the-Moors.

On the night trip over I suggested a bicycle race in the plane's spacious gymnasium. On account of my wound, I rode a small velocopede, which brought me closer to the floor in case I should encounter a serious accident. Abdul Benny

finished two or three bottles of brandy the colonel's wound in the back of the neck felt better, and he suggested that we go down to the plane's sidewalk cafe and have a nip of ale and some air-conditioned cheese sandwiches which a famous Swiss cheese planter had sent him as we were about to take off from these Cockney Moors.

Over our ale, the colonel told me that the cheese planter who had sent him these special sandwiches was the direct descendant of a family that had been planting cheeses ever since Hannibal crossed the Alps and defeated Napoleon at the battle of Gettysburg.

Napoleon had stayed overnight at this family's house, and he had said that their cheese plantation was the finest he had ever seen.

During the night, while we played bridge in the plane's tropical card room, we passed over Cairo, Egypt, where the colonel and I went ashore for a diplomatic interview with the King of Egypt, who served us some very excellent Burgundy and ale, with Egyptian mummy cakes.

Then we took off for home and arrived at Mulligan's Inlet at eight A. M.

But my wound was so bad that I had to be carried ashore and taken on horseback to Mike's Place to get a little brandy, which made me feel better and I was able to go into the conference about your latest letters and sketches.

Abdul Benny Smid, as usual, objected to everything and threatened to use his knife, but we finally succeeded in agreeing on these winners for this month:

Burton Leavenworth, 23 West 73rd Street, New York, N. Y.; George Horn, 93 Russell Street, Clifton, N. J.; Stanton Bowker, 16 Fremont Street, Claremont, N. H.; Robert Seuss, 1900 Lithgow Avenue N. S., Pittsburgh, Pa.; Frederick O. Farris, R.F.D. No. 2, Lometa, Texas; Dick Tullar, 1515 W. 3rd Street, Waterloo, Iowa; Vernie Robinson, Drumright, Okla.; Robert Gallett, R. R. Highway 100, Wauwatosa, Wis.; Donald Purrington, Newall Pond Road, Greenfield, Mass.; Walton Harris, 5320 Waterman Avenue, St. Louis, Mo.

Leavenworth's peculiarly opaque idea is on the preceding page.

This plane cost Colonel Houseboat five million dollars.

No one else has ever been able to con-

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We are offering every month ten prizes of one dollar each.

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Draw your idea of the colonel's famous secret plane, mail it to us, and the ten funniest in the judges' opinion will be selected as winners.

Many hints of the luxuries of this plane have been given you from time to time—such as the Irish library, the goat room, the great conference room with knives and automatics and pen and ink at every seat. Be sure to put your name and address on the back of your sketch.

Fill out this coupon NOW!

I want you all to send me seven coupons each, as we are going to Paris next month and I need some Green French opera knee pants for a special reception that is going to be given me. Don't fail me on these coupons. Send one anyway. I shall expect it at once!

THE HOT AIR CLUB **March**
 Popular Publications,
 205 East 42nd Street, New York.

Sign me up quick! I like these stories best:

1.
2.
3.

Name

Address

struct such a plane. The one-arm lunch room, the Broadway Bar, the Irish smoking room and library, and the combination conference room and shooting gallery—what other country can boast such absolute perfection in the air today?

The great Louie Quince dining salon can accommodate as many as one hundred drinkers—I mean, that is, diners—and I remember one flight last year when seated at the table were the Prince of Wales, Greta Garbo, the Duchess of Deleria, Gwendolyn Marshmellow, the famous Hollywood star who, in private life, is Mike's sister, Gertie Mulligan. The trip was in honor of myself—

But this wound is bothering me so much that I think I shall rest a bit and let some of you mugs yodel.

Now, listen to this smelt:

1160 E. King Street, York, Pa.

Dear Mother's Boy: I am sending you one of your 1-cent coupons, and if I don't win the buck I'll see why I joined this lousy club a couple months ago.

Yours till the water wears rubber pants,

James Sheets.

What you need, James, is a bale stick applied where it will prevent sitting for two weeks. I did my best to get your sketch through, despite your most insulting remarks, but Colonel Houseboat thought it a little too semi-angular.

And here are some more frightful insults:

Crichton, Alabama.

Dear Eugene: Say listen, you big hunk of boloney, if you don't send me a buck for this one I am going to blow you up with one of my new super-firecrackers. And listen, you better keep away from blond Jane because Count Pest is dangerous.

Well, so long, Bughouse 67%.

Oliver Allen.

P. S.: Here is your coupon.

Listen, Oliver—if somebody would crown that blond jane with a monkey wrench I would even shake hands with Count Itchover Pest.

But I'm so dizzy from this wound in the nurse's wrist—I mean, in the back of my neck, that I must get my horse and ride back to Mike's Place for a little sip of Hennessy's Tonsil Remedy. See you next month!

Watch for next month's issue!

It's a batch of sure-fire air yarns, featuring—

THE DYNAMITE TRIO

A Smoke Wade novelette

by Robert J. Hogan

"I don't reckon we'll hear from that bomber tonight," Smoke said. "With these low clouds, it would have to fly down to three hundred to see at all—and I reckon no bomber is goin' to do that."

. . . . But several hours later, Smoke Wade knew that he was wrong. For the bomber not only came over—but it didn't fly below the clouds. There were no wings for the ground-gunners to shoot at . . . only the roar of engines above and the brilliant flash of death bombs as they tore into the tarmac of the 66th!

Blam! Blam! Down the line that strange, unseen bomber flew, destroying every hangar in turn. What was this winged messenger of destruction? How could its pilot sight his targets in the dark? It's a smashing mystery sky yarn complete in the April issue of

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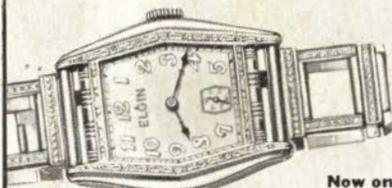
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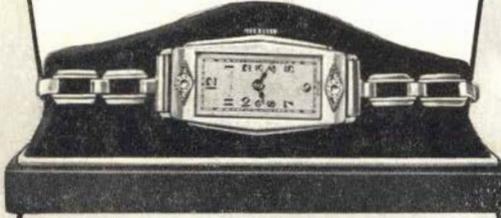
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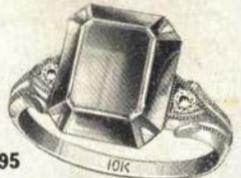
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