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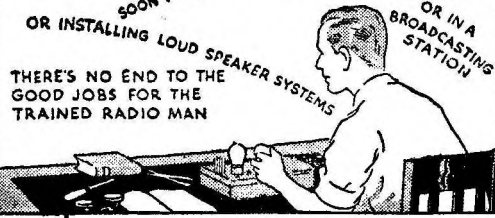


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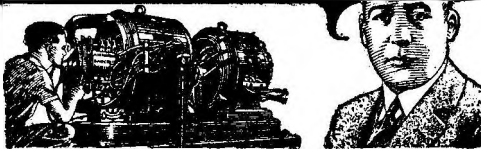
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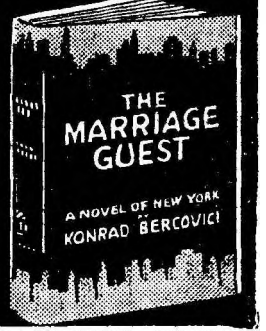
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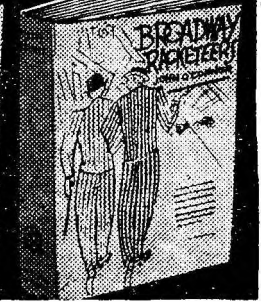
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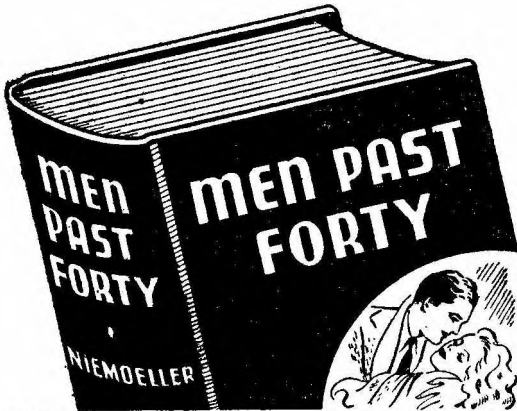
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CHAPTER I

"BURY THIS DEEP"

RITTMEISTER Ernst von Hohenberg snapped down the receiver of his telephone and stepped to the mess-hall door.

"*Achtung!*" he barked to the assembled pilots.

They stiffened to attention. Each face was woodenly immobile as eyes were turned to the *Jagdstaffel* leader.

"The balloon hunters are on their way to the Krimhilde line," he told them. "It is the same pair of damnable Yankee swine, who—"

He stopped as he saw a man's face at the messroom window. He muttered a Teutonic oath and summoned the *Feldwebel* in charge of the headquarter's non-commissioned staff.

Krimhilde line. They must be stopped. Do you understand?"

"*Ja wohl, Herr Rittmeister,*" they chorused and trooped out to where their Pfalz pursuit planes were drawn up.

Captain von Hohenberg retired to his own room to don his flying togs. In his helmet he carefully placed the stocking *Fraulein* Hedwig von Oestermann had given him. Then followed a handkerchief once carried by Mitzi Leidergesang, the famous music-hall beauty. A fragment of the old Albatros plane in which Ernst had won his entry into aedon was taken from a small metal box on his dresser and placed in a leather case suspended from his neck.

A few minutes later he strode stiffly across the field and clambered into his cockpit. Mechanics jerked the chocks in answer to his gestured command and the

THE SPAD FROM

By JAMES PERLEY HUGHES

"Holtz," rasped the *Rittmeister* in cold anger, "I have told you for the last time to get rid of that cross-eyed sentry. I am not superstitious, but the last time that pig-dog watched me take off, I crashed back of Mauberg."

"*Ja wohl, Herr Rittmeister.*" The sergeant major saluted and hurried away.

Ernst von Hohenberg turned back to the members of his squadron. A member of the envied circle of *Kanonen*, winners of ten or more official victories, he had martial prestige as well as Junker blood to make him typical of his class.

"As I was saying, gentlemen," he resumed, "the Yankee swine are on their way to attack the *Drachen* along the

squadron took to the air. Hohenberg swept up and nosed toward the Krimhilde line.

The *Rittmeister* raised his high-powered field glasses when they neared their objective. His thick lips formed an imprecation as he saw two darting dragonflies race down at a balloon far to the east. A plume of smoke shot up and the planes winged away. Another sausage had been destroyed.

A signal went out from the *Rittmeister's* cockpit. The pilots crowded on every ounce of power, and swept on in perfect formation, roaring down like a locust swarm upon the two Americans. A second balloon burst into flames as they neared the scene. Then the Yankees

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dashed at the third. The big bag was gliding for the ground, dragged down by frantic winch men.

At a flash from the *Rittmeister's* wings, the squadron struck. The Americans were flying narrow-winged Spads. Their leader had assailed the balloons with streaks of sparkling, inflammatory bullets, while his accomplice rode high and behind him, guarding his tail. Von Hohenberg flicked a signal for a divided attack. His own flight and the men under Wolfgang von Unworth struck at the sausage-raider, while the third flight assailed the guarding plane.

The Spad below was gaining on the helpless sausage, its throttle open wide. *Rittmeister* Ernst watched its weaving flight. The man was known to the German Intelligence service, which had spent

From the cowl guns of the Spad came a smashing burst—and a flash of flame flickered through the sausage's envelope

no small time looking up his past. Once a Kentucky horse-breeder, he had ridden the winged steeds of the air with the same reckless daring as his equine mounts at home. Since his coming to the Western Front, more than a score of *Drachen* had fallen before his guns. The morale of the German balloon service had been shaken and the command had gone out that the American must be destroyed, even if a whole squadron of planes had to be sacrificed in doing so.

AS the formation swept down, Ernst saw his foe dart at the *Drachen*, although it was only a few feet from the ground. A clatter came from the cowl guns of the Spad, and a string of flame ran up the bulging envelope. The Spad flicked to one side, its task done. A flash, a pall of smoke—and the charred fragments slithered toward the ground.

"Davidson—Neil Davidson!" The *Rittmeister* mouthed the name he had read in the official intelligence communiques. "I'll have that on a white cross or—our mine will be there."

The Pfalz roared down, but Davidson slid out of line and shot up. Hohenberg looked back. The Spad was hurtling straight for Hermann von Liebknecht an ace second only to the *Rittmeister* himself in victories gained.

"Hermann will get him," Ernst mumbled, "and if he doesn't—"

At a blast from Davidson's guns von Liebknecht's Pfalz turned over. There was another crash, and its nose dropped. Flames began to run along its side. Next pilot and plane were tumbling.

The *Rittmeister* swung around to attack the American. At the same moment, he saw Wolfgang von Unworth and Lieutenant Hertzog rake the darting Spad with their guns. His own joined in. The American turned, riddling one of von Unworth's less experienced pilots, but his Spad was staggering. Hohenberg moved in, ready to give the *Todsschlag*, or death blow. Then the American lost control and began falling.

"Germans take no chances," Ernst told himself, nosing after the helpless Davidson. He had been fooled before by clever pilots who had simulated death.

He could see Neil Davidson working desperately at the controls. At last the Yank brought the nose up, but his ship was settling rapidly. A moment later it made a crash landing in an open field.

Von Hohenberg followed, eager to capture the most noted of the American flyers. He nosed for the field, signaling to a squad of infantry that had come out of the woods. Neil Davidson had leaped from his cockpit and was facing the ground troops, an automatic pistol in his hand. Tongues of flame leaped from it, and the foremost gray-green soldiers staggered, then fell forward on their faces.

"Pig-dog—he murders to the last," Hohenberg rasped.

His own trucks touched and he alighted. Davidson was still firing at the infantry. At last his weapon was empty and he defiantly threw the useless thing at the nearest of his assailants.

Rage filled the *Rittmeister*. Not only was Neil Davidson fighting to the last, but his companion in the air had come down to spatter the field with machine-gun fire. The Pfalzes descended and drove him back, but he crashed another of Ernst's pilots. Meantime the infantrymen had dashed into the woods and returned with a Maxim machine gun.

"Here, you men," the *Rittmeister* called to them. "Come here."

They scuttled toward him, dragging their weapon.

"Let me have it," Hohenberg swung the ugly snout around.

Neil Davidson stood before him, unarmed. As he saw the Maxim leveled at him, he grinned and held his hands aloft.

"You sure have got the drop on me, captain," he called. "I reckon it's up to me to say *Kamerad*."

A flush crossed Ernst von Hohenberg's high cheek bones, and his rather piggish eyes narrowed.

"You say *Kamerad*?" he yelled in English. "Say it in hell, you swine."

His hands tripped the gun and a sputter of shots made the weapon throb. He veered the brazen muzzle until he saw the bullets kick the dust from the American's uniform.

Neil Davidson swayed, an expression of surprise in his clear eyes. His grin faded.

"You hound!" he managed to say, as the Maxim ended its clatter. "I'll get you for that if I have to come back from hell to—" A dark stain came to his lips, stopping his words, and he sank to the ground.

"There," growled the *Rittmeister* "He'll crash no more *Drachen*. That is finished."

THE second American plane, which had been fighting to save Neil Davidson, whirled as he fell, and darted toward the lines. Meantime, Ernst von Hohenberg strode across the field and looked down at the face of his victim. He was boyishly young, with crisp brown hair and clean-cut features. Ernst scowled.

"A brave man, a gallant enemy, *Herr Rittmeister*," said an infantry sergeant, gesturing to the body.

"Brave? A fool—a madman."

There was a pause; then Hohenberg turned to the sergeant. "Do you speak English?" Ernst asked.

"Yes, sir," in that tongue.

"So do I, but this Yankee idiot—what did that idiot say just before he fell?"

The sergeant hesitated. "He said, *Herr Rittmeister*, that he would come back from hell, if need be, just to get you."

"Get me—*was machts?*"

"Kill you, *mein Herr*, or something like that. It is an American provincialism scarcely translatable into the tongue of *Kultur*."

A frown furrowed its way between von Hohenberg's brows. His hand slid into the breast of his uniform to touch his lucky bag. He looked around to see a small group of French peasants edging toward the Spad, attracted by its fall. He beckoned them to him.

"Take this and bury it—deep," he instructed, nodding toward the body. "Mark the grave with a cross. The name is Neil Davidson, first lieutenant, U.S.A."

Next he turned to the sergeant. "Load this plane onto a truck," he ordered, "and have it taken to my airdrome. The fool did not destroy it. I want to study these Spads, with their Yankee attachments."

"*Ja wohl, Herr Rittmeister.*"

Ernst clambered back into his Pfalz and took to the air. To his pilots, returning after a fruitless chase of the second Yankee he gave a signal to reform, and then started back to his own landing field.

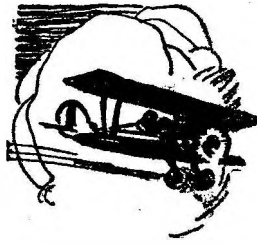
Bellowed cheers greeted von Hohenberg when he entered the mess-hall for lunch. Glasses of Rhine wine were raised to toast him.

"Another victory for *Herr Rittmeister*, our *Uberkanone* — our superace," they shouted.

"That—it was nothing," he mumbled. For *Rittmeister* Ernst was not his usual self-congratulating self. Neil Davidson's last words still stuck in his mind. The swine had said that he would come back from hell, if need be. Von Hohenberg had killed many men, but this was the first time a dying enemy had spoken to him.

CHAPTER II

BACK FROM HELL



DAVIDSON'S threat hovered for several days. Ernst sent an orderly to the scene of the crash, and felt more assured when the man

reported that Neil Davidson had been buried and he had seen the grave.

The squadron flew in its usual patrols, and the pilots noted that their leader grew more savage in his onslaughts with each day. But even his activity failed to erase the memory of the boyish American and his dying threat. Almost a week had gone by when the *Rittmeister* summoned Eric von Hassenpflug, an officer operating in the aerial intelligence department.

"This Neil Davidson, the balloon-breaker—just who was he?" Ernst inquired.

Hassenpflug thumbed a sheaf of reports and finally laid one upon the *Rittmeister's* table. Hohenberg screwed his monocle into his eye and studied the paper.

"H-m-m! He bred white Arabian horses in the province of Kentucky, I see," Ernst muttered. "What has that to do with military affairs?"

"We get everything, *Herr Rittmeister*," Hassenpflug replied. "Our operatives even managed to obtain a picture of Davidson, mounted on a white horse."

Ernst von Hohenberg shuddered slightly.

"The only white horse he'll ride now will be through hell," he said with a harsh laugh.

But the words of Neil Davidson haunted him. The American had been heavy with Maxim bullets when he spoke them, and he must have known that Death had touched his shoulder.

"His body is in the grave tonight," the *Rittmeister* thought, as he went to bed, "and his soul in hell."

He looked out of the window. A full moon was shining and he could see the dark forms of the sentries pacing before the hangars.

"Said he would come back from hell

to get me," Ernst mumbled as sleep overcame him. "Back from hell—that's where a Yankee pig should go—ride a white horse through hell—*Schwein*—he's—"

THE clatter of machine guns, the crash of small hand bombs, the belated calls of guards and the frantic fire of rifles caused Ernst von Hohenberg to leap from his bed.

He leaned out the window to stare into the moon-drenched sky. Careening through it was an all-white ship from the nose of which came flashes of flame. Striking like a fury, it swept down upon the airdrome.

Rittmeister Ernst snatched up his night glasses, focusing on the all-white plane. They disclosed a pilot with crisp brown hair, unrestrained by the conventional helmet. His face was boyishly young. Neil Davidson had had hair like that, but he was in his grave.

A plane—an all-white plane—von Hohenberg had never seen one on the Western Front. It bore no national markings, no serial numbers, no squadron insignia.

"Back from hell—he rode a white horse." The words formed, but had no sound.

Then he laughed harshly, drew on his flying suit and dashed across the field, yelling to the hangar crew to bring out his Pfalz.

The darting white plane was throwing drags that threatened to destroy both the *Rittmeister* and his Pfalz. Yells of warning came from every side, but Ernst von Hohenberg leaped into his pit and gave the cold motor the gun.

In another moment he was in the moonlight, fighting with a foe who was more phantom than actuality.

Although a *Kanone*, Ernst von Hohenberg had not been aloft more than a few minutes when he realized he was engaged with a master pilot. More than that, the phantom was flying as though his motors had been warmed by the fires of hell, while the Pfalz threatened to choke every time he threw the sauce full on.

"Ghost or devil, the bullets you throw are solid enough," Hohenberg growled, when a burst crashed his tiny windshield.

He dared a storm of cherry-tinted tracer and bored in. The ghost ship's fire

threatened, but he held his course. He must either crash the phantom or perish himself. He unleashed his Spandaus, trading shot for shot. Then, before he realized it, his foe was on his tail.

Blasts came from the white cowl. The stammering note was new to von Hohenberg's ear. Then he remembered noting that Neil Davidson's Spad had been equipped with Marlin, an American type of machine gun, devilish in efficiency.

"One thing sure," Ernst reflected, "this isn't the ghost of Davidson's plane. That's down in our shops, dismantled and—"

A burst of angry laughter replaced his thoughts. He was at grips with an enemy airplane painted white, a plane that threatened to crash him unless he conked it first. He had allowed his mind to wander from war's grim business to think of ghosts.

"Black Forest tales," he sputtered, gunning the rapidly warming Pfalz.

Once more they lunged at each other. A cold ferocity entered into Ernst von Hohenberg's tactics. He knew by the throb of his adversary's motor, the design of the rudder fin and the position of the struts that he was engaged with one of the new-type Spads. The dazzling white of its paint had nothing to do with the reckless skill with which it was flown.

"Whatever he is—whoever—I'm going to crash him," the *Rittmeister* swore.

He speeded his attack, but the white plane eluded him without difficulty. He drew a signal pistol and fired into the air. Bright balls of fire burst, summoning the squadron flight leaders to his aid.

But with the burst of signal lights, the fury of the ghost ship doubled. The pilot plunged at Ernst at a speed that threatened to set the sky aflame. He was everywhere at once, firing first from one angle, then another. Von Hohenberg suddenly changed his tactics. Wolfgang von Unworth, Franz Mueller and Fritz Bauer, his flight commanders, were winging up into the moonlit sky. If he could hold the phantom until they arrived, their perfectly rehearsed teamplay would make a quick end of the raider.

ERNST dodged and twisted. Occasionally he threw drags in reply, but the fury had left his attack and he was fencing until his comrades arrived. He looked down to see them leave the ground.

He maneuvered in a frantic circle until they had formed, and then threw up his tail, diving with power full on. The ghost plane followed, burning his rudder fin with a burst. Hohenberg veered and flicked a signal with his wings. He saw Franz Mueller answer.

The *Rittmeister* could see the three flight leaders swinging into positions. German preparedness would show that it could triumph over Yankee audacity. Hohenberg shot in between the deployed flight leaders. His maneuver would give them opportunity to leap upon the Spad and blast it from the night sky.

As his Pfalz came up, he twisted to watch the destruction of the ghostly visitor. But instead of having followed him into the neatly contrived trap, the phantom plane had veered like darting lightning. As Ernst looked around, he saw its silvery shape shoot toward Franz Mueller, its guns blazing.

"*Schrecklich*—" the oath died on *Rittmeister* Ernst's lips when he saw Mueller's Pfalz nose downward, its tail whangingly helplessly.

Next the saffron blaze of burning gasoline joined the pale sheen of the moonlight. The Spad had struck with a deadly precision, and Mueller was snuffed out before he even could get his guns in action.

Hohenberg thrust his own nose down when he saw the ghost ship strike at Wolfgang von Unworth. Once more the white Spad's guns flamed and the pink stream of its tracer crashed into the second Pfalz. The machine staggered and fell away.

Horror came into Ernst von Hohenberg's straining eyes. The Spad had turned to engage Fritz Bauer. He, too, would be shot to bits like his companions. The *Rittmeister* shoved his own throttle to the limit and charged with Spandaus ablaze. Bauer scorched for the carpet, the phantom riding his tail. His controls were riddled and he hit the airdrome landing field with a force that sheared his trucks.

NEXT, the white streak curved upward and shot in von Hohenberg's direction. Ernst dodged to one side. Before he realized it, the Spad was chasing him in a circle, lashing him from behind.

Desperation clutched Ernst's heart, and his cheeks paled. Although he might be fighting the devil himself, he could not weaken. Reason told him that Yankee flesh and Yankee blood had brought this night of terror. Even so, the pilot of the white Spad seemed far more fiend than human.

Ernst von Hohenberg was ready to die, but only in the Prussian manner. Hope had deserted him, but he would perish fighting. He managed to twist around in time to throw a drag at his enemy. The American answered with a blast that filled the air with flying sparks. Hohenberg bored in, resigned to death. He remembered, suddenly, that he had left his talismen in his quarters. Mitz's handkerchief and Hedwig's stocking were on his dresser. Even the fragment of his lucky Albatros had been forgotten.

"There's no hope," he muttered.

He held his trips until hardly a cartridge remained, then waited numbly for the obliterating crash. He saw a flash of light rip into his cowl, and the engine died with a throaty gurgle. The nose dropped, and the prop slowed swiftly.

"The finish," he told himself.

The Spad flicked behind him and he turned in his seat. He would face his executioner. He waited for the Marlins' flicker; then his brows lifted. For the white Spad was circling him, the pilot holding up a limp and empty cartridge belt. He had fired his last shot.

Next came a wave of the hand. "Until we meet again," the gesture pantomimed. Then the white ship wheeled and flashed through the moonlight toward the lines.

A curse squeezed out between *Rittmeister* Ernst's clamped teeth. He would rather have met death than go down and meet his pilots after such an exhibition. Then, looking down, he noted a commotion among the men on the tarmac. They were waving to him, pantomiming frantic joy. He stiffened in his seat and nursed the Pfalz to a landing.

"*Hoch! Hoch!*" was the greeting.

Ernst von Hohenberg stared.

"Only our *Rittmeister* could fight the devil to a standstill," they praised.

He squared his shoulders and drew himself erect. "That—it was nothing," was his arrogant reply.

The *Rittmeister* was himself again.

Save several cents a pack! Try Avalon Cigarettes! Cellophane wrap. Union made.

Junker pride, the stiff-necked hauteur of the Prussian, returned and he stalked to his quarters.

A moment later he was standing, white-lipped and shaking, staring at a letter upon his dresser. Written on a card was a message in German, French and English. It had been placed there while he was battling in the sky, while his pilots and mechanics were on the field, staring up at the combat. Only a few words, yet they shook him more than a touch from Death's fleshless fingers. Once more he read:

I am coming back from hell to get you.

ERNST von Hohenberg raised his glance to see his own reflection staring at him from the mirror. The livid face and protruding eyes were a greater shock than the message. For the mirror showed a thoroughly terrified man attired in the uniform of the Imperial Flying Corps. A *Kanone*, who had sent more than ten enemies tumbling to doom, was putty-colored with fright.

He gripped himself and took up the letter to study it once more. The blood flowed back into his cheeks until they were crimson. He burned with a fury that surged through him in increasing waves, raged at his own weakness, his childish fright. A trick had been played on him.

He bawled an order that brought Holtz, the headquarters' *Feldwebel*, scurrying into his rooms.

"Who was in here while I was up there?" the still gauntleted hand pointed toward the sky.

"No one, *Herr Rittmeister*."

"Some one was here." Von Hohenberg held up the letter. "You will check the movements of every officer and man in the squadron and then report to me."

"*Ja wohl, Herr Rittmeister*."

CHAPTER III

SATAN'S CHALLENGE



RESEARCH was made of every building, the quarters of the pilots, the hangar crews and infantry guards. Paper and envelopes were inspected in hope of finding a duplicate to that used

in the note. At first von Hohenberg had suspected it was a joke of his flight commanders or pilots, but as the inquiry went on, he sensed something more serious. An arm had reached across No-Man's-Land to leave that note, hoping to shake his morale.

Morning found the *Rittmeister* again in consultation with Eric von Hassenpflug, the Intelligence officer.

"That note could not have come from the white plane," Ernst pointed out. "It was in the air from the time I hopped off until after I had come down."

Von Hassenpflug frowned. The strange message suggested spies and secret agents unknown to him or his operatives.

"That white ship was mere dramatics." He dismissed the nocturnal visitor with a wave of his hand.

"Dramatics, perhaps," Ernst replied, "but they cost us one flight leader and three badly damaged planes. That raid would have resulted in my death, but for—"

"But for your own resourcefulness and intrepid courage, *Herr Rittmeister*," the other finished. "I have heard about it a hundred times already. You fought the devil to a standstill."

"That? It was nothing!" Von Hohenberg preened as he spoke. He turned the conversation to the man who had always ridden with Neil Davidson, when the balloon-buster was raiding the German *Drachen*.

"The American's name is Harry Brawley," von Hassenpflug told von Hohenberg. "He is a man of no caste. He and the Davidson person, whom you killed, had been friends for years, but from what we can learn—"

"You learn about everything that amounts to nothing," snarled Ernst, his nerves still jangled by the night's experiences. "Get out!"

"*Ja wohl, Herr Rittmeister*."

But during the days and nights that followed, von Hohenberg passed through experiences that would have shaken more stable nerves than his. Strange happenings, weird and almost supernatural, came in swift succession. Tiny white airplanes, toys in size, drifted down from low hanging clouds. Attached to them were photographs of a freshly made grave in the forest, a white cross erected at its head. Upon it appeared the name

SA

of Neil Davidson, but on the back of each picture was the message:

I have come back from hell to get you.

FOLLOWING the receipt of the third photograph, the *Rittmeister* drove to the sector where Neil Davidson had come down. He summoned the French peasants who had buried the American and they led him to a small grove not far from the field where Davidson had fallen. In the center was a grave, with a white cross at its head.

The blood receded from Ernst's cheeks as he turned to Eric von Hassenpflug. The Intelligence officer flushed.

"The photographs seem—er—authentic," he blurted.

"Yes, you ass," barked von Hohenberg, "and if you keep on blundering, the morale of half the squadrons in this sector will go to pieces. They know what is going on. Every one in the hangars crosses himself at the mention of a white Spad. Not only that—"

"But what, *Herr Rittmeister*?"

"Those Yankee dogs will know everything we do," Ernst finished. "This is spy's work, not spirit messages or table tipping."

Hassenpflug nodded solemnly. "But what can I do, *Herr Rittmeister*?" he asked.

"Do?" the squadron leader yelled. "You can go to hell. If you see that swine there"—a gesture to the grave—"tell him to come and get me—if he can."

He stormed back to his car. Eric von Hassenpflug followed, but he remained silent during the trip back to the airdrome.

More days passed and the tension relaxed somewhat. Ernst von Hohenberg began to feel like himself again. The old routine of toasting the *Rittmeister* just before he retired to his quarters was revived, the pilots standing with glasses upraised as he stood in the doorway. It was a custom he enjoyed. It invoked memories of his boyhood days in East Prussia, when the peasants sang their good-night to the lord of the manor.

*"Hoch soll er leben,
Hoch soll er leben,
Hoch soll er leben—
Dreimal hoch!"*

Thus bellowed the birdmen one evening as Ernst von Hohenberg stood on the threshold, smiling back at them.

"Highly shall he live—thrice highly," rang the chorus.

A yell sounded outside, and a volley of shots.

The voices of the singers were hushed. Ernst von Hohenberg rushed to the landing field. He saw a squad of infantrymen about a high-angled Maxim, which blazed into the night sky, its fire directed by a searchlight.

Ernst looked up. He caught a flash of white, ghostly wings, but they zoomed and were swallowed by a low-hanging cloud. Next, the beam of the searchlight fell upon a tiny airplane drifting down. It struck a few moments later.

Attached to the fuselage of the tiny plane was a letter addressed to him. Hohenberg ripped it open and stared at the strange message. Small blotches appeared upon his high cheek bones as he read:

Although Herr Leutnant von Hassenpflug has not appeared in hell as yet, your message has been received. I have warned you that I am returning from the fires to get you. If you are not a Prussian pig, you will meet me halfway. The place is over the lines at Pont Pucelle. The time is the witching hour for us ghosts—midnight. One week from tonight is the date. The moon will be full. You may bring your gang with you, if you keep them on the ground.

The letter was not signed. There was no need. The *Rittmeister's* face grew bleak. His words to Eric von Hassenpflug had been spoken while they stood beside the lone grave in the forest—Neil Davidson's last resting place. The message was weird, uncanny, devilish. A cold chill shook his spine.

Then he stiffened. The eyes of the assembled pilots were upon him. He was their commander, a *Kanone*, a Prussian officer of the oldest Junker blood. He took his monocle from his eye and smiled at them.

"A letter from Satan, who seeks a rendezvous," he announced, holding up the letter.

THREE weeks had passed since Ernst von Hohenberg had turned a machine gun on Neil Davidson, shooting down the American balloon-strafer in a surge of rage. They had been three weeks of torment. The last seven days had been the worst. Ernst's hours aloft found him looking constantly for some sign of Har-

ry Brawley, the close friend of the dead balloon-wrecker.

For Harry Brawley was tangible, and his motives plain. The man's desire to avenge Davidson's death was only natural. His strange methods would have been merely amusing, had it not been for the letters that appeared magically on von Hohenberg's dresser. Sometimes they came while he slept—at others, when he was away, leading his formation. Each contained a photograph of Neil Davidson's grave with its white cross shining in the shadows of the forest.

Once more the *Rittmeister* called Eric von Hassenpflug into consultation. At the Intelligence officer's suggestion, they examined Davidson's plane, which had been brought to the airdrome and reconditioned by German mechanics. For a time, Ernst wondered if it had been used for secret flights across the lines, but investigation showed that it had not been off the ground.

"It isn't human," von Hassenpflug declared.

"Not human?" rasped the *Rittmeister*. "Do you think some ghost has come to haunt me? You are a fool."

"*Ja wohl, Herr Rittmeister.*"

In spite of Ernst's words and his pose of disbelief, tales of ghosts, vampires and other weird creatures flitted through his mind as day succeeded day. The time for his rendezvous with the phantom Spad was near. Stories the German peasants spin around the open fireplaces during the long winter evenings came back to haunt him, but he pushed them aside resolutely. He knew they were only legends, but in the light of the uncanny events surrounding him, they assumed an importance he could not ignore.

Finally the day came when he would have to wait no longer. Night would see him jousting with the devil in a snow-white plane. He spent the morning tuning his Pfalz. He had had enough of a taste of the ghostly pilot's prowess to know that he would have to use every trick in his ken. He did not flinch from the encounter. He could not. His standing as a *Kanone* demanded unswerving valor in the face of the unknown.

EVENING came, and he took his place at the head of the table to joke with the pilots of his squadron. He drank,

laughing loudly at the heavy humor of the birdmen. The meal finished, he retired to his quarters.

As the hour for the hop-off neared, he dressed with care, taking each of his favorite talismen and placing it in its accustomed place.

Dressed for the air, he strode back into the mess hall. The pilots snapped to attention when he entered. He clicked his heels and answered their salutes, then gestured them to be at ease.

"I am going to make a strange rendezvous, *meine Herren,*" he began, "a meeting from which I may not return. If I should not, I want *Herr Leutnant* von Unworth to—" He paused to glance around the room. "Where is the *Herr Leutnant?*"

"Inspecting your plane, captain," was the answer. "Also, Lieutenants Bauer and Dierman are checking guns and controls."

Rittmeister Ernst smiled. He knew that he could depend upon his flight leaders to attend to everything.

"Quite right," he told the pilots. "I may meet the devil tonight, my gentlemen, but if it is *auf wiedersehen* for all time—live well, my friends."

Squaring his shoulders and tightening the monocle in his eye, Ernst von Hohenberg strode toward the door with all the hauteur of an Uhlan on parade. He was going out to meet the unknown, to keep a midnight rendezvous above the lines with an enemy more fiend than human. It was a tryst with Satan, yet he did not shrink. A thrill went through the pilots as he stopped on the threshold.

"*Hoch! Hoch! Hoch!*" they shouted.

The *Rittmeister's* straight form melted into the night shadows, and they watched him stride across the field to where his Pfalz was waiting. They paused, tingling, until his trucks had left the ground; then they swarmed out onto the field.

The airdrome took on an activity rivaling any of its daytime operations. Planes were wheeled out, their motors partially warmed. Huge trucks crept out of the shadows, mechanics and infantry guards climbing into them.

Soon the formation roared up into the moonlight and headed for Pont Pucelle, and the trucks trundled away.

CHAPTER IV

MAN OR DEVIL



WITH the shouts of his pilots still rolling across the field, Ernst von Hohenberg started for the lines. He had half an hour to spare, as he throttled down, glancing back occasionally. At times he cut his motor to listen.

At last, sounds of engines came through the still night and he snatched up the nose and cut in the ignition. He smiled quietly as he touched Mitzi's handkerchief. A few minutes later, he was over the lines, and he followed their dazzling lights toward the place of rendezvous. In addition to the ghostly gleam of magnesium star shells and parachute flares, he saw the groping fingers of searchlights combing the heavens.

"We both thought of that," he mumbled, as he observed that some of the swaying beams came from the American side.

He glanced down to see the bridge flung across the Meuse. There was Pont Pucelle—the place of meeting. He made a wide circle and then came back. He was still a trifle early.

Another detour, and he swept toward the bridge, staring into the western sky. The bright pencil of a powerful ground lamp was moving toward the Front. In its beam were outspread wings—white wings, like those of a moth flying through

the night. Hohenberg's smile faded and a hard, almost fierce expression took its place. He circled, dipping into the blaze of one of his own searchlights. The white wings wagged in recognition of his action. Now the two ships were approaching each other in direct line. Ernst leaned forward and glanced at his guns. A short blast to test their readiness, and he shoved the throttle to its limit. The Pfalz leaped forward like a frightened thing. He could see the pilot of the phantom plane quite clearly now. The man wore no helmet, and his hair streamed in the air current. The *Rittmeister* looked long. Neil Davidson's hair had been like that. But the man could not be Davidson. The balloon-buster was dead. Von Hohenberg had seen the white cross bearing the American's name and rank.

"God be with me!" Ernst muttered.

As the American neared the lines, Hohenberg saw the searchlight, which had been following the Spad's flight, shift its beam, leaving the white ship in darkness. Then the light crossed over to be fixed upon the Pfalz.

"Clever teamwork—for a ghost from hell," Ernst thought.

All tales of ghosts and vampires were forgotten. It was war in the air, war with the most modern and scientific aids. He had been made a victim of trickery by swinish Yankees, but he would pay them in their own coin. He glanced around, staring nervously into the moonlight.

"They won't be long," he said to himself. "I shall match trick for trick."

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He looked down, and saw that the German searchlight crews had followed the example of the Americans and were training their beams upon the mothlike Spad. He glanced through his sights and straightened out. They were on the same level and soon would be within gun shot. His pressure on the trips tightened and he set himself for the opening exchange. He steeled his nerves for the sound of the American's guns. After the first bursts, Ernst forgot danger, but the start of a battle invariably forced him to shiver.

ON, on they roared. Ernst frowned. The phantom had not started to fire. The Spad was dashing toward him, but its pilot was intent on wagging signals to the searchlight crews.

A flash of suspicion came into Hohenberg's mind. Perhaps he was flying into an ambush. He had been challenged by this man, and had accepted the offer without thought of trickery, in spite of his own secret plans. He wondered why the moth plane was silent.

"Damn him—I'll find out," he growled.

He concentrated on his fire, nursing the stick with sensitive, well-trained hands. He saw the Spad dodge to one side when the Spandau tracer broke almost over the white cowl. His own nose dropped, and he roared up into a half-loop. The maneuver should have brought him down on his adversary's tail after a simple wing-over, but instead of having the man at his mercy, he found the American riding his rudder, lashing at him with burning blasts.

Hohenberg dodged and twisted, but the American hung on. Sudden realization came to Ernst that he was being driven across the lines into American territory. He spun, trying to keep within sight of his own trenches, but the white wings swept in, forcing him to dart back to keep from being shattered.

"What is he up to?"

The American had made no real attempt to crash him. Ernst frowned as he gauged his foe's tactics. He had expected a duel to the death with quarter neither given nor asked. Instead, the combat had taken a turn he could not understand. Once more he tried to evade the man's driving maneuvers, but the Spad was the fletcher of wing.

"War bars no tricks," von Hohenberg mumbled.

He glanced into the moon-flooded sky. His night glasses swept the sector on the other side of Pont Pucelle. Then he wagged his wings three times.

"The result justifies anything," he muttered. Once more his wings rocked back and forth. Then he spun, almost on their tips, and attacked the Spad with fresh ferocity.

He glanced over his shoulder, and his fixed smile hardened. More lines of tracer sprang out to streak the air. A roar sounded from above, and into the searchlight's glare dropped three Pfalz planes, each nosing for the white moth. Ernst had called for his flight leaders and they had come. It was a move of desperation, but war is filled with tricks.

"A trick, but justified by—" His mumbling ended with a yell. Instead of being caught off guard, the phantom had swung around, his throbbing Marlins less than thirty yards from Wolfgang von Unworth. Two short, fierce drags, and Ernst's friend from boyhood slumped forward, clutching at his chest.

The shimmering thing then lunged at Dierman, knouting him with flashing whips of tracer. Bauer swept in to help his comrade, but the Spad checked him with a burst.

Von Hohenberg's wings wagged frantically, flashing fresh signals. His first call for aid had been the result of sudden panic. Now it was a question of national pride. He repeated the summons, again and again. From far to the left flared balls of colored light. His command had been received. He turned to attack the phantom plane once more, determined to destroy it or crash into oblivion.

A flush of hate crossed Ernst's face as the Spad dodged away and lunged at Fritz Bauer again. The flight leader had come back into the battle and was firing at long range. The Yankee, however, closed the gap between them with a spurt of speed. His Marlins jabbered, and the beam of a searchlight revealed a Pfalz wing sheared from the empennage as though giant blades had come together.

Then Ernst unleashed his own guns as the white Spad came lunging toward him. He fought back with desperate fury, striving to save himself. If he could only hold out for seconds, then he might live through the night.

"Ach—at last," he sighed.

He glanced toward the moon. The bars

of a dozen wings were silhouetted against its silver shield. In spite of the ghost plane's speed and daring, it would have no chance against a squadron of trained Pfalz pilots.

"We shall tear him to bits," the *Rittmeister* told himself, "and after tonight, he will haunt me no more."

But as the men of his squadron roared down, another tiny Spad, no larger than the phantom, whisked across the lines and struck at Ernst von Hohenberg.

The Pfalz leader's eyes went wide. The flush on his cheeks faded, and livid pallor came. The Spad had cut across the beam of a searchlight, and in that fleeting second, Ernst had seen another pilot whose streaming hair recalled Neil Davidson and the lonely grave in the forest. More than that, the ship he flew was the one the balloon-buster had ridden the day he had gone to his doom. It was the Spad that had stood in the *Jagdstaffel's* hangars not half an hour before.

"What are you—man or devil?" von Hohenberg croaked as the plane came swiftly toward him.

NEVER during the days when he was struggling to win his place as a *Kanone* had Ernst von Hohenberg fought as he did that night. Fury held him, and he drove his Pfalz without regard for danger. Every trick of battle in the air was summoned, but in spite of his efforts, the two streaking Spads swept in between him and his charging flights of Pfalzes.

His men swept around, striving to aid him, but a barrage of archie fire crashed into their ranks. American searchlights played upon them, while ground guns sent up a veritable curtain of high-explosive shells. The Pfalz planes climbed, striving to avoid destruction. Ernst von Hohenberg dropped his tail, trying to follow them, but the two Spads maneuvered in such a manner that he was forced to dive again.

Working with a precision that challenged his most daring efforts, they forced him to fly at a level no greater than five hundred feet. He darted and twisted, rolled and slipped, but they kept after him, driving him like a helpless sheep. Their Marlin blasts broke around him, threatening to tear his ship to bits—threatening always, but just missing.

His struggles became more desperate

as he lost sight of his squadron. An American night-flying formation had swept down from nowhere, dispersing his men. They were without leaders, and the stern discipline of the men was gone.

Desperation clutched at his heart. He felt himself in the hands of forces more than human. The trickery of the all-white Spad was plain enough, but this second ship's presence had shaken him until cool judgment was impossible. His mind was dull. He could not account for Davidson's plane, yet it was scourging him with stammering bursts. No traitor was at its stick—he was sure of that. He had glimpsed the pilot as the machine flashed across a searchlight's brilliant beam. The man had looked like Neil Davidson, but that was impossible. Davidson was dead.

A shudder coursed down Ernst's spine, but he shook himself and turned toward the stranger, determined to test his tangibility. A rattle of Marlin fire and he saw a streak of red break almost before his eyes. He dodged instinctively. Another blast came from the white phantom, and he turned the other way.

He glanced ahead. Ground lights shone like a carpet spread across a field not far away. He stared at the pilot of the all-white Spad, and saw him pointing down. Ernst von Hohenberg shook his head.

But the Spad edged closer. Its companion on the other side moved in. The three ships were all but touching tips. Another signal from the phantom ordered him to land.

Rittmeister Ernst thrust forward. He was far behind the lines, and his petrol supply was low. After all, what could he do? He had been overcome by superior numbers.

CHAPTER V

GRIET OF THE GODS



THE three ships glided down to touch trucks almost at the same instant. A swarm of men rushed across the field, yelling, dancing, bellowing like maniacs. The frown between the German's brows deepened. Savages, these Americans! He wondered if he would be tortured. He'd already heard of this.

The yells crescendoed as the Spad pilots alighted. They gestured the crowd

back and turned to Ernst, ordering him out of his pit. He obeyed numbly, holding his hands aloft.

"Come with us," the pilot of the white plane commanded.

"And you can put your arms down," his companion added. "We don't use machine guns on prisoners over here."

Von Hohenberg stared at the man again. His face was pale, almost ghastly. Not ghastly—ghostly, the German thought, as he looked at the almost colorless cheeks. His features were those of Neil Davidson, but Davidson was dead. The thought made Ernst shudder as he recalled the lonely grave in the forest.

"Who—who are you?" he managed to stammer.

"Me? Don't you remember me? You ought to. I'm Neil Davidson."

"But—but—Neil Davidson is dead," Ernst whispered hollowly.

"Yeah? How do you know?"

"Because I killed—"

Ernst von Hohenberg stopped as Davidson shoved back to his chair and leaped to his feet. For a moment his hand rested on the butt of his automatic pistol. His eyes flashed.

"Hold on, buddy," Harry Brawley interposed. "Remember what—"

"Okay—I'll remember," the man broke in. His white fingers unbuttoned his blouse and tore open his shirt front. Across his chest was a line of freshly healed wounds.

Ernst von Hohenberg's jaw dropped. "So that grave in the woods—" he began.

"Empty," Neil Davidson finished. "Those French peasants carried me away, and found I was still alive in spite of what you did to me with that Maxim.

They doctored me. Then they delivered the notes you found in your room. They helped me get some messages and the picture of that fake grave across the lines to Harry Brawley. Next we started out to get you. We did, but you gave us a lot of help."

"I—helped—you?"

"Yeah, with your little German superstitions. We knew all about them."

Ernst looked at his captors for a moment; then he arose and bowed stiffly to Neil Davidson.

"I congratulate you, sir," he said with formality. "Your recovery and return are worthy of felicitation. Regarding my shooting you—it was the fortune of war that made it necessary. But for me, the war is over and—"

"Oh, no, it's not," Neil Davidson broke in, his pale face flushing. "The man who shot me down when my hands were in the air isn't going to get off with a dose of officers' prison camp, with a flock of Heinies waiting on him. No! We have other plans for you."

Ernst von Hohenberg's pale blue eyes widened as he stared at the Americans' grim faces. With an exclamation of horror, he leaped to his feet and snatched the automatic pistol from Neil Davidson's holster. The muzzle flicked upward. The American grabbed the German's arm as a shot roared in the small room.

The *Rittmeister's* taut figure relaxed, and he sank weakly to the floor.

Neil Davidson was silent for a moment. He lighted a cigarette and inhaled slowly.

"I'm glad he did it, not I," he mumbled half to himself, "but the gods surely ground out a fine batch of grist that time."

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“Airyplanes Is Useless!”



*The Short
dropped
two bombs—
and missed!*

By CHARLES V. KERR

“Sky Skimmers”—that was what 1st Class Gunner Weaver of the U. S. Navy contemptuously called the seaplanes patrolling the English Channel. But that was before a certain morning when an old freighter met up with a U-boat in the choppy sea off the coast of France.

"We sail the seas and drop the shot
To keep old Fritz down,
We ram and shoot and camouflage
To get the diving hound.
When he floods his ballast tanks
To beat it safely home,
He'll hear a load of T.N.T.
Go boom in his microphone!"

"O H, yeah?" drawled the foredeck lookout, with insulting emphasis.

"Yeah!" asserted Clint Weaver, gunner first-class, interrupted in his ditty of the fighting flotillas. Shoving his Navy cap to a challenging angle, he advanced from his perch by the shield of the six-inch gun mount. "Yeah!" he repeated. "That's exactly wot the Navy is doin'! That's why they stuck me in this scummy old bucket! To protect peagreen swabs like you, and this worthless airplane cargo, from U-boats!"

The deck-hand opened his mouth for a suitable comeback, then thought better of it and wisely decided to pipe down. He was an ordinary civilian seaman. And the smart U. S. Navy gun crew rated pretty high in a merchant ship like the *Wabash*.

The *Wabash* was a tubby freighter, bound for Cherbourg under a cargo of Liberty motors and airplane parts. As they had nosed down Ambrose Channel at half speed, Gunner Weaver had lost no opportunity to impress the lookout with his scornful view on aerial warfare. Convinced that he had won the debate, he returned to the gun breach and resumed his salty song.

But again he was interrupted. This time it was a hum high over the old freighter's decks that broke into his melody. Tilting his freckled beezee skyward, the stubby gunner gave a grunt of disgust. For three training Jennies were making wide, wobbly circles over New York harbor. He spit disdainfully over the lee rail and addressed the lookout again.

"Hey, swab! I kin tell from the way your eyeballs hang out that you think them airypplanes is doin' something important!"

"Sure," the lookout stubbornly maintained.

"Well, they ain't! I been acrost the old pond three times now on convoy duty, and I never seen one o' them skimmers do anything useful yet!"

"Oh, yeah? Maybe they ain't doing plenty at the Front!"

"The Front? What Front? Listen, swab, if it wasn't for the Navy, they wouldn't be no Front! And it's Navy guns, not them rag-and-splinter gadgets, what's holding the Heinies back! See?"

"Say, gob," said the lookout. "All I hope is that you can shoot that gun as good as you shoot off your bazoo!"

GUNNER WEAVER could shoot. And he had a chance to prove it eleven days later, as the old *Wabash* wallowed in the long swell of the English Channel. Seven hundred yards off the port beam, under a cold, gray dawn, the foredeck lookout sighted an ugly, slim form rippling the surface of the heaving sea.

"Submarine!" he shouted. "Submarine!"

On a man-o'-war it would have been a gladly expectant cry, but in a vulnerable old packet like the *Wabash*, it was a cry of fate, a dreaded warning. Officers on the bridge leaped to speaking tubes, tense with foreboding. Down in the bowels of the ship a gong beat out the call to general quarters. Like startled rats, the civilian crew scampered over the decks and collided with one another in reaching their assigned battle stations.

It was up to Gunner Weaver and his gun-mates now to make good their boast. All of them had been through the submarine zone before. With the grim calm of seasoned men-o'-warships they took their places behind the gun on the foredeck.

Quickly they swung the eager snout of the Navy six-inch onto the low target. It was point-blank range, almost. The range-finder buzzed, like a rattler about to strike. Gunner Weaver, crouched behind the gun shield, jammed the firing switch into its socket.

A gut-jarring roar shook the ancient freighter's rusty plates. Loose deck gear leaped and rattled. A black billow of smoke gushed out from the foredeck. Up on the bridge the *Wabash* skipper, an excitable little man with a fringe of faded whiskers like moss on the ship's bottom, emitted an outraged yowl as he beheld the weather cloth surrounding the *Wabash's* antiquated wheelhouse ripped and tattered by the tremendous concussion.

The high-explosive shell was briefly visible, like a tiny black dot racing with incredible speed towards the target, in-

distinct in the murky light. It blossomed suddenly into a bloody star as the shrieking metal smote the conning-tower fair-water of the submarine. The periscope sheers snapped, and the open-mouthed *Wabash* crew saw the U-boat's eye hurtle a hundred feet into the air.

Hoarse cheers sounded. The lookout even joined in. It was a spectacular bit of marksmanship, but it came too late to save the *Wabash*. Before the ammo-handlers could shove another red-nosed powder bag into the breech, a thin streak of foam drew a deadly line straight towards the freighter's broad, heavy belly.

The skipper jangled the engine-room telegraph and hurled the steering indicator hard apart. Before the slow hull could swing, the torpedo struck with terrific impact. A geyser of sea water rose alongside, higher than the funnels. The bottom plates ripped open, and a cargo of American wings intended to command the skies of France sank slowly to the ocean's floor.

There sounded now that hopeless cry of the sea.

"Abandon ship! All-ill hands, abandon ship!"

THE ship's officers, pistols gripped in white-knuckled hands, raced for the boat-falls. Seamen fell on slippery decks. From out of the stricken vitals of the ship the black gang crawled—what was left of them—on oily ladder rungs, wreathed in rising steam, dragging scalded, helpless shipmates with them.

Brief as the time had been, the decks already were canting steeply. The port-side falls were useless. On the starboard side, only one boat was successfully launched before the sea rose over the mid-deck and slapped in fast-rising circles around superstructure bulkheads.

The death-scent of German T.N.T. still hung in the breeze as forty-three survivors pushed off from the sinking *Wabash* in a lifeboat designed for a capacity load of twenty-eight men.

It was one of the lifeboats to which the Navy gun-crew had been assigned. Therefore, Gunner Weaver was one of its hazardous burden. Up in the dangerously deep-laden bow, he found himself squatted alongside the lookout. He forced a grin of bravado at the other's white, tense face.

"You here, swab? I figgered ya might

be back there, ridin' one o' them junky airyplanes—to the bottom!"

"Yeah?" chattered the lookout. "Well, right now would be a good time for a plane. For there lies Fritz, unable to submerge. Man, what a couple of sky-bombs couldn't do to that pig-boat!"

The *Wabash* skipper seemed to share the lookout's hopeful viewpoint. Strapped in a life-jacket three sizes too large for him, the skipper squatted in the stern sheets, beside the steersman.

"Rest oars, men!" he ordered. "The Limeys have a duck patrol in this area. They'll find us! They'll find that U-boat, too!"

"A duck patrol, huh?" grunted Gunner Weaver under his breath. "Well, of all the no-good skimmers cluttering up this war, the worst of all is seaplanes! It proves exactly wot I told ya, swab! In a scrap, nothin' counts but guns. And the best gun wins!"

A silence fell over the boatload of chilled, fearful survivors. Gradually the gloom of early dawn gave way to the light of a gray, cheerless day on the Channel.

Gunner Weaver had started to hum, preparatory to lifting his voice in hopeful song, when a steady drone sounded off in the north.

"Silence up there!" demanded the skipper. "Stow that noise!"

The sky sound grew. And all at once the vague form of a low flying plane burst out of the mist. The little skipper leaped to his feet, waving frantic arms.

"A seaplane!" he shouted. "A Limey flyer! He's sighted us, men. We're saved! Give him a cheer, lads!"

GUNNER WEAVER did not join in the feeble cheer. He was still skeptical of any good to come from aircraft.

"Not yet we ain't saved!" he told the lookout. "Look, that bird's bearing dead onto the sub now! We put the Heimies' wet-gun out of commish, but he ain't done for yet, by a long shot! There's going to be some more airyplane decoratin' the bottom soon!"

Gunner Weaver's prophecy was more nearly accurate this time. From past crossings, he had learned that Germany's *untersee* craft were well able to defend themselves from hostile aircraft. U-boats were equipped with deck-sockets, onto which machine guns could be quickly fitted. Even as he spoke, Boche bluejackets

poured from the battered bridge hatch, lugging a Spandau. Before the British seaplane could get into bombing position, a spurt of tracer glinted up from the submarine's deck.

Engagements between subs and aircraft were not uncommon in Channel waters. But the *Wabash* survivors quickly realized that they were witnessing something more than an ordinary encounter, for their own rescue depended on the outcome. It was something like one hundred sea miles up to the Devonshire coast—and one hundred miles is a perilous and uncertain voyage for a badly overcrowded lifeboat.

The tracer sputtered closer to the 70-foot wingspread of the seaplane, which was a Short, one of the pre-war vintage crates operating out of Plymouth. Gunner Weaver's expert eyes observed that it did not carry Vickers mounts with which to answer the submarine's fire, but only a clumsy 1½-pounder mounted on the blunt nose of its nacelle.

Behind the stubby gun, the lifeboat's company saw the gun-layer. He swung the piece, and the 1½-pounder boomed. Once. A splash rose, missing the slim U-boat deck by many yards.

"Rotten!" groaned Gunner Weaver. "But then, what can ya expect with a bundle of rags and matchwood fer a gun-platform?"

The Spandau continued to rake the sky with long, determined bursts, and all at once, just as a pair of light bombs shot down from the Short's undercarriage, Boche marksmanship was rewarded. Splinters flew from the pontoons. The seaplane rocked like a hit bird, and the flying gunner sank suddenly from view.

"Good Lord, they winged him!" howled the *Wabash* skipper. His face was as gray as his whiskers now. With hands that shook he lifted a pair of binoculars to his eyes to observe the extent of the plane's damage.

The two bombs fell exploding far short of their target. On a wingtip, the Short made a long, slanting dive, its motor sputtering. Wicked spears of tracer followed it down until, a half-cable's length from the lifeboat, the rounded nose went up and it pancaked with a terrific splash.

"Fine fightin' tools, these airyplanes!" remarked Gunner Weaver.

The whiskered skipper lowered his glasses and reported.

"The gun-layer, he's done for, that's plain," he said. "Looks like the pilot's hit, too! Blast the luck! But keep up courage, men! We've got another hope, and that's the Channel patrol! That torpedo could have been heard for miles!"

But peril more deadly than the moody sea sent a new ripple of fear through the crowded, helpless boat's company. The menacing skip-skip of Spandau slugs whipped the sea. One slug spat against the tiller.

"God, sir!" wailed the steersman. "We're direct in the line o' fire! They're still pouring it into the plane!"

"Oars!" bellowed the skipper. "Live-ly! Lean into 'em for your lives, men!"

A GRUNT from the steersman came with the splash of the first, hasty stroke. Letting go the tiller, he gripped his throat, a dazed expression in his eyes. Red gushed from between his fingers. He swayed an instant, and as the skipper clutched at him, but missed, he pitched overboard.

The men at the oars needed no driving now. The blades swept rapidly to and fro to pull them out of that murderous path of Spandau metal.

Down they went, into the trough between two high-crested swells, offering a brief refuge from slaughter. But as the boat topped the running swell, another hail of bullets whined and crackled across the eddying stern. The skipper gripped the tiller now. Gunner Weaver prodded his lookout companion with an elbow.

"Airyplanes!" he gritted. "Airyplanes! Wot d'ye think of 'em now, swab?"

The lookout had no answer. The argument that had raged between them all the way across the Atlantic, during their long watches of enforced proximity on the foredeck of the *Wabash*, was very much in Gunner Weaver's favor now.

The skipper's voice crackled again.

"The plane's settling! Her pontoons shot full of holes, likely!"

"Her pilot is signaling us for rescue!" sang out one of the men.

But the skipper held his course. A boatload of humanity could not be sent into that zone of merciless slugs to save one life. Even as the lifeboat surged under the sweeping oarstrokes, another burst from the U-boat's gun ricocheted about them as the Huns tried again for the Short. One leaden fragment spat into the

cutwater of the lifeboat. Splinters whizzed. One of them struck Gunner Weaver's cheek, bringing a trickle of blood.

That leaden fragment turned the tide of the weird battle. The sting on his cheek sent a reckless rage surging through the gunner's fighting soul. A rage against the Boche, so intent on their kill that they sent their fire into a helpless lifeboat.

He leaped to the gunwhale, and stood there balanced for an instant. A bark came from the skipper.

"Grab that crazy sailor! Tryin' to capsize us, you loon? Down! Down in the bow!"

Gunner Weaver turned. "Aye, aye, sir!" he sang back. "Down it is!"

Down then went his body in a long, sweeping dive.

The icy sea gripped him. His body stiffened with a torturing ache in every muscle. He burst to the surface, ten feet away from the menacing slash of the rapid oar blades. Spluttering and gasping, he saw astonished faces turned on him.

"Carry on!" howled the skipper. "No time now to stand by!"

And stand by they did not. But Gunner Weaver had no intention of being hauled back into the lifeboat. His course of action was determined. Partly buoyed, and as much impeded, by the clumsy life-jacket strapped around him, he struck out towards the sinking plane.

It was not a long swim. The Short had struck the sea near the *Wabash* boat, and the breeze was bringing it rapidly closer. Yet Gunner Weaver was on the verge of exhaustion as he reached the rolling, pitching plane, clambered onto a half-submerged pontoon, and pulled himself, dripping and shivering, onto the nacelle.

The pilot stared at him with a white, tragic face. He coughed once and wiped the blood from his lips with a sleeve.

"No use, Yank!" he said hoarsely. "We're done for!"

"Done for, hell!" yelled Gunner Weaver, struggling to keep the shiver out of his voice. "Pull your tanks, Limey! Dump 'em! They'll keep us afloat long enough to—"

He clambered into the gun-layer's position in front of the pilot, and as he did so, he saw the crumpled form of the dead

gun-layer in the bottom of the fighting pit. He squirmed behind the 1½-pounder and gave the breech a quick inspection.

TO his relief he saw that the weapon was the same type as the salute guns used in the American Navy. A row of loops under the mount carried a full row of brass shells, headed with fragmentation shells. Tiny projectiles they were, compared to the ones fired in a six-inch. But skilfully aimed, a 1½-pounder at short range was no piece to be ignored.

The plane sat low now, so low in the sea that the Boche were finding it increasingly difficult to deliver a lethal burst into it across the restless swells that alternately concealed and exposed it.

He spun the muzzle of the 1½-pounder around. Topping a swell, he caught a hurried glimpse of the U-boat, submerged nearly level with the conning tower, the seas sweeping its decks and harassing the Spandau crew. A swarm of sailors labored on the conning tower.

"Trying to plug that busted hatch and submerge!" he told himself. "I'll show 'em!"

A sweep of Spandau lead rippled the topwing, inches from his head. He jerked down on the firing pawl. The 1½-pounder emitted an ear-splitting crack, the recoil jarring the frail, shattered structure of the crippled plane.

He fired again on the down slope of the swell, reloading with expert speed. He was unable to see the result of his work, but a spirited yell from the direction of the lifeboat told him that he had made a hit. Up again on the ceaseless roll of the sea, he saw the repair crew carrying the limp body of a shipmate up the bent rungs of the conning tower ladder.

His next shot fell short but luck was with him. It skipped and fetched up against the sub's plates with a metallic crash. The shell burst and the three men crouched behind the Spandau crumpled. Three others leaped from the group on the conning tower. It was a grim struggle for survival now. Once a British patrol craft sighted that crippled hull, it would make short work of it. And the Boche knew their peril.

At the lift of the next swell, the Spandau was manned again, and tracer whipped into the plane. A strut parted with a loud spang. A wing sagged. Gunner Weaver flung a glance at the Limey

pilot, pale but grinning now. The fellow nodded encouragement.

Gunner Weaver fired again, and from the chorus of cheers that came from the observers in the lifeboat, and the crash of metal yonder, he knew he had succeeded in making a direct hit.

"I'm gettin' the hang o' this thing now," he decided. He pressed his face against the sighting tube alongside the clumsy barrel and waited for the heave of the sea to expose the U-boat again. As that moment came, a gasp escaped him and he relaxed his grip on the pawl.

It was a gasp that sounded very much like disappointment.

For on the bridge of the battered U-boat stood an officer. The Boche skipper himself, perhaps. Over his head he waved a staff. And on the end of the staff, which looked like a boathook, fluttered a signal that was the universal language of the defeated foe—a white flag!

It dawned slowly on Gunner Weaver that he, practically onehanded, had made one of the most coveted captures that a man-o'-warsman can hope to make. He stood erect, and from his throat rose the victory cry, the shout of the conqueror, the shrill, challenging yell that has leaped from the lips of fighting men since time immemorial.

But all at once, his voice trailed off into the note of a crowing rooster, then ceased. For Gunner Weaver began to realize that he had lost his argument with the swab of a lookout.

Aircraft had their use, after all!

Of all men, he, with the old Navy's scorn for flying, had engaged the enemy in a detested plane. And he had credited that plane with a U-boat victory!

A new cry rose from the lifeboat. Dazed, Gunner Weaver gripped a wing-edge and scanned the young mountains of sea that separated them. Off in the north, then, he saw the reason for the submarine's amazing surrender. With a flat ribbon of black smoke whipping from her rakish funnels, a British destroyer was bearing down on the scene at full speed!

He felt suddenly weak and dizzy and dropped back to the gun-layer's pit. The pilot was sagging in his harness, eyes closed, blood trickling from his lips and staining his breast. Gunner Weaver became aware of the fact that the sea was invading the bottom of the nacelle. The Short lay low in the water now. Only the

buoyancy of the emptied petrol tanks was keeping the gallant hulk afloat.

"Useless as the buttons on an admiral's sleeve, these lousy skimmers!" he muttered. But deep in his heart, Gunner Weaver felt a grudging admiration for the ripped and riddled seaplane. The salt stung his cheek and he mopped a trickle of blood from his splinter cut. He wondered if he would rate a wound stripe and grinned at the notion.

He was beginning to shiver again, uncontrollably. Maybe a song would warm him. He lifted his voice in the ditty of the fighting flotillas:

"We sail the seas and drop the shot
To keep old Fritz down,
We ram and shoot and camouflage
To get the diving hound.
When he floods—"

A ripping yell came from a crest, close alongside. Gunner Weaver swung around with a scowl. Something was always interrupting his song. He saw the lifeboat pulling heartily towards him. At the tiller the *Wabash* skipper stood, spraddle-legged, confidence renewed.

"Ahoy, sailor!" came the hail. "Stand by for rescue!"

The old tradition of the sea now gripped Gunner Weaver—the loyalty that makes any man-o'-warsman ready to fight or argue, as the case demanded, for whatever craft he happened to be in.

"Rescue, the devil, sir!" he retorted boldly. "I'm skipper o' this bucket and I'll have ya know she's seaworthy!"

He saw the faces of the men light up with the glow of hero worship. But no such noble emotion stirred the lookout up in the crowded bow.

"Hey, salty!" he yelled with impish delight. "What you think about airyplanes now?"

The lookout wore a taunting grin. "How about it?" he demanded. "You still think them rag-and-kindling gadgets are any use in a fight?"

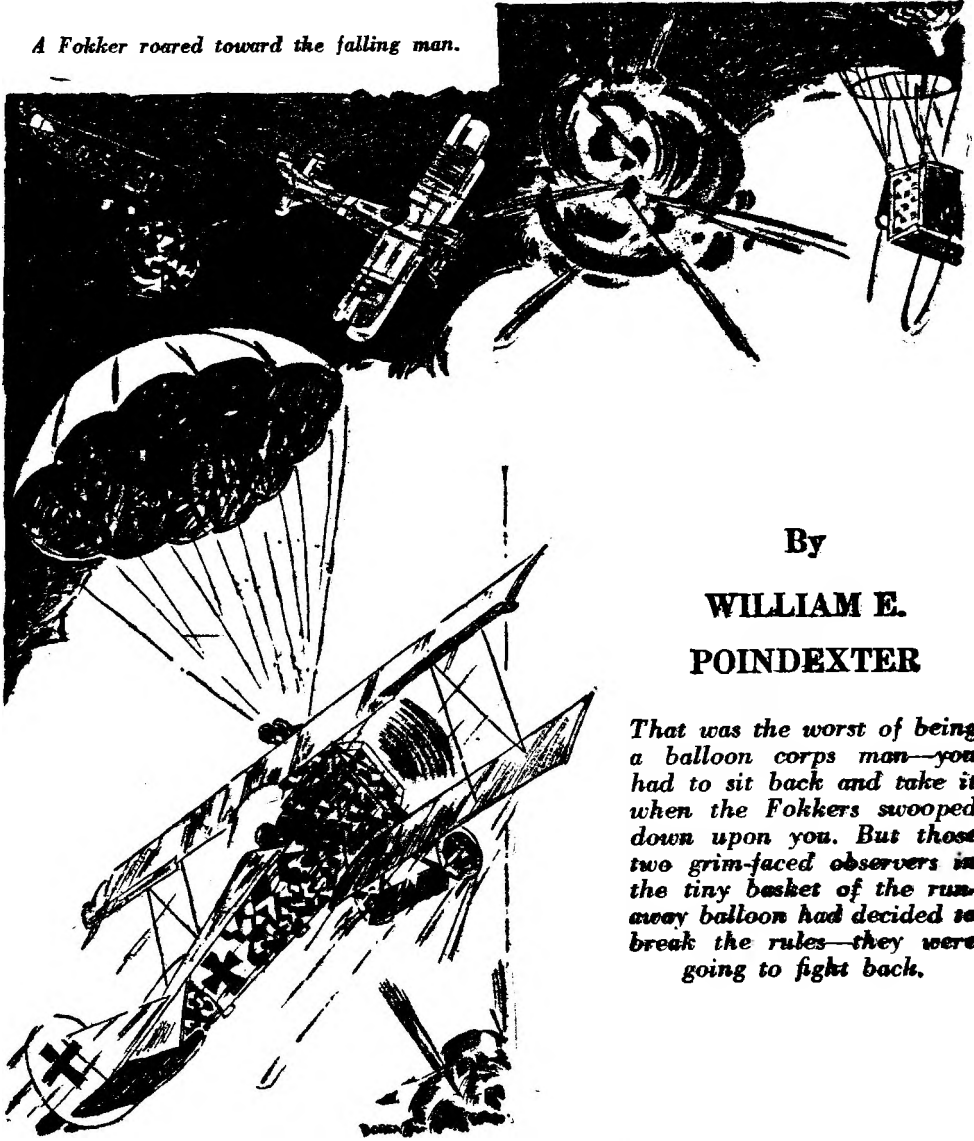
Gunner Weaver gulped. He ran a hand over the coaming of the gunpit, a gesture that was more than half a caress. After all, a man-o'-warsman had to stand up for his ship, he decided.

"Once in a while," he admitted gamely, "they come in handy in a pinch, swab!"

A cackle of laughter greeted his admission. So he could not resist adding, "As a platform fer a Navy gun! See?"

Observers Can Take It!

A Fokker roared toward the falling man.



By

**WILLIAM E.
POINDEXTER**

That was the worst of being a balloon corps man—you had to sit back and take it when the Fokkers swooped down upon you. But those two grim-faced observers in the tiny basket of the run-away balloon had decided to break the rules—they were going to fight back.

ALTHOUGH it lacked an hour of dawn, an insistent and unmusical voice in the operations office of Balloon Section Number 9, persisted in informing a sleeping world that it wasn't *la guerre* that made him a wreck, but a certain mademoiselle who hailed from Armentières.

Dick Terril, fully dressed, stepped softly around the corner, his brow fur-

rowed with amazement. It wasn't customary for the skipper of a balloon section to be singing ribald songs at that hour of the morning. It was more natural for him to be hurling boots, alarm clocks and shocking words at any dog-robber daring enough to wake him to the cares of the day.

Terril pushed the door slightly ajar and peered in at the C. O., who stood

in the middle of the floor, dolefully profaning the air with what he believed to be music, and staring at a couple of life-size uniformed dummies that leaned in dejected attitudes against the wall.

Dick thrust the door farther open and stood leaning there, rolling a cigarette and shaking his head sadly.

"Do you know what they do with grown-up men who play with dolls in the middle of the night like this?" he demanded. "Well, they have nice padded cells for 'em with bars over the windows. I saw it coming on last night, Stanton, and that's why I'm around with my butterfly net this morning."

Captain Buck Stanton whirled tensely, a menacing light in his narrowed gray eyes which told of overstrained nerves. Then he relaxed when he saw who had interrupted him.

"You go to hell," he ordered gruffly. "It's too early in the morning to try to be funny."

Dick Terril disregarded this command from his superior officer, and placidly continued to roll his cigarette. He pushed back his amazing mop of flame-colored hair and grinned engagingly at the grim-faced young officer who happened to be his best friend.

"Well, would you mind telling me why you're sitting up playing with a couple of dolls dressed in officers' uniforms?" he inquired. "I'm nutty myself, but I'm not that nutty. And anyway, I don't go around singing naughty songs about French ladies at three o'clock in the morning."

Stanton appeared on the point of hurling the furniture at his friend, and Dick hastily lit the cigarette and thrust it into Stanton's mouth as a peace offering, while he rolled another one for himself.

The captain slumped down wearily on a box and sucked moodily at the cigarette. His was the rugged, fighting face of a bulldog, but just now he appeared to have the distemper. It was quite obvious, from the man's lined face and his red-rimmed, puffy eyes, that he had not been to bed that night.

"Buck," Terril said quietly, "I've known for several days that you've had something on your mind. Come across, guy, spill it. Where do you get off, hold-

ing out on me like this? I want to know why you're associating with a pair of dummies at this time of the morning. That's why I'm prowling around here instead of getting my much needed beauty sleep."

"It's because the wind is in the right direction," Stanton replied.

TERRIL carefully inspected the end of his cigarette and nodded. "That's lucid, all right," he admitted with elaborate sarcasm. "You've been playing with a couple of dummies all night because the wind is in the right direction. Thanks, captain. That explains everything!"

In spite of his light words, there was real hurt in Dick Terril's voice because the captain did not take him into his confidence. Stanton sprang up to slap him resoundingly on the shoulder.

"See here, old man," he said sharply, "I haven't said anything about this to you because it means the finish—my finish. But you've forced my hand. You know something of what I've been up against lately. Wing has been sitting back there with its feet on a desk and a cigar in its mouth, demanding observation over Harcourt at any cost. Well, it's cost plenty. Gas bags shot down, balloon trucks blown up, and four of the best damned observers in France gone to hell—and no observation, either."

He turned away, biting his lips savagely in an effort at self-control. When he turned back, his face was impassive, but his narrowed eyes were hot and feverish.

"I've explained to Wing till I'm black in the face that the Krauts have every inch of the Harcourt sector under direct fire, and that our trucks are blown to atoms the minute we get one in where we can raise a balloon. But there's something big going on back there, or at least there are rumors of it, and Wing will accept no excuses. I had word last night that if I couldn't get results, I could report back to H. Q., and they'd get some one up here who could."

"Hell!" Terril broke in sympathetically, and ground the end of his cigarette under his heel. "The observation they want is impossible, and how well I know it! Why, the air is so closely

patrolled: there that even a *chasse* plane can't get through, and how do they expect a balloon to go where a plane can't? They're stumped, and they're trying to make you the goat, if you ask me. I've seen Holly and Knowles and others blasted to shreds, and I've barely escaped myself. Not because of you, Buck, but because of fool orders from Staff. Let the beggars send some one else up here and they'll find it out. What you can't do, no one can."

Stanton smiled grimly at his friend's loyalty; then his face hardened.

HE leaned forward, his haggard eyes glowing, and glanced at his wrist-watch.

"Not much time left," he muttered. "Dick, those fellows back there who never saw observation duty except through the bottom of a cognac bottle have asked the impossible, so by thunder, I'll accomplish the impossible! I've made my arrangements, and have just been waiting for a favorable wind. You know that the Jerries have been concentrating on shooting the observers when they jumped. Busting the bag is incidental. They know that trained observers are scarcer than balloons.

"All right. I've had the ground crew attach the bag to hooks so that I can release it by a lever from the basket. As I said, the wind is right this morning, and the balloon will drift along parallel to the lines till it gets over Harcourt."

"Where the Krauts will promptly knock it, and you, to Hades," Terril interposed, beginning to roll another cigarette.

"Wait! I'm taking my two dummies with me. When the German planes come down on me, I'll toss the dummies overboard. They're good enough to fool anyone at a few yards when they're floating down in chutes, and the Jerries will go after them before they do the balloon—if I have a little luck. Don't you see it, man? It gives me the few additional necessary minutes to make my observations."

"Yea," Dick admitted, "but a few kilometers below Harcourt, the bag will drift over the lines where they bend to the west—provided the balloon isn't destroyed before then. And if you jump,

as you'll have to, they'll get you, anyway. So what use will your info be, dumb guy, when you're too dead to spill it?"

"That's all arranged," Stanton broke in insistently. "I'll jot down my notes in a steel-backed despatch book and throw it overboard. I've already given the sergeant of the ground crew instructions and he'll be able to locate it.

"Dick, it's my finish, and I know it. I'll never reach the ground alive, but by God, no man will ever be able to say again that Buck Stanton started something he couldn't finish. I'll be dead, but I won't be a failure!"

The redheaded Dick Terril scratched his chin and stared reproachfully at his friend.

"And you were going out alone on this insane death-patrol without letting me know!" He shook his head sadly. "Captain Stanton, I never thought that I'd be forced to use such language to my superior officer, but—you are a damned liar!"

From any other man such words would have meant an instantaneous and bloody battle, but the hard-boiled captain only narrowed his eyes and clenched his big, scarred fists.

"What do you mean by that, Dick?" he demanded quietly enough.

"You said you were going alone," Terril burst out hotly. "Well, I say you're not. It'll take two men to do the job properly; one to make observation and the other to write down the information. Remember, we won't have all day to do it in. Why, say, General Pershing himself couldn't keep me out of this party. Hell, lad, when do we start?"

The captain shook his head gloomily, although his eyes were gleaming. "I knew that you were sap enough to want to go. That's why I didn't say anything about it. But you had to go prowling about when all decent citizens—except myself—should be asleep, and declare yourself in. You realize that it means death?"

Terril shrugged his shoulders and flung back his red hair. "I don't give a hang what it means," he retorted levelly. "Two can do this job better than one, and if I land in hell—well, I go in good company."

FOR a moment the two men stared straight into each other's eyes; then Stanton threw up his hand resignedly. They had shared life together—they would share death. He glanced again at his watch.

"Time to start, Dick," he said crisply. "I'm not going to weep down the back of your neck and kiss you on both cheeks, but I just want to say that you're man-sized, Terril—you blasted redhead. Now swing onto one of those dummies and get going. I've figured the velocity of the wind, and I intend to get over Harcourt at just about the time it's light enough for observation."

Highly embarrassed by the captain's words of praise, Dick seized one of the dummies by the arm and yanked it toward him, only to be stopped by an agonized cry from Stanton.

"For cripe's sake, Dick!" Stanton yelled, his face suddenly going a sickly yellow. "Handle that thing gently. Easy, you idiot!"

Terril glanced about with a grin which faded from his face as he saw that the captain was in deadly earnest. With exaggerated care, as if he were carrying the holy person of a field marshal, he draped the heavy figure over his shoulder, and made his way through the darkness to the balloon emplacement. Captain Stanton followed him closely with the other dummy, the metal-backed despatch box slung over his shoulder by a heavy cord.

Stanton saw to the careful disposal of the dummies himself, and when the two men climbed into the swaying basket, Terril saw that loopholes had been cut in all sides of it to facilitate observation without the observers being obliged to show themselves over the rim.

For a moment the redheaded observer stood thoughtfully there, balancing himself with unconscious ease as the basket tipped in the light breeze. He sucked in the cold, sweet air of early morning, and he knew that he was afraid. He was afraid to die, afraid to go on this mission that meant certain death, afraid of the sizzling incendiary bullets that would tear into his vitals and give him a foretaste of hell. Yet it was characteristic of him that it never once occurred to him that he might still back out. Afraid or not, nothing could

have kept him from sharing the fate of the grim, single-hearted captain who deliberately planned death rather than give up and admit that he was a failure—that he could not accomplish the impossible.

Stanton gave his orders to the ground crew in a low voice, and the big gas bag began to rise. There was no sound except the ghostly sighing of the wind in the rigging and the creak of the windlass. Up and up they went, cut off from the world, suspended in a black void that seemed to have no limits.

THE bag had only been partly inflated with gas, and it ceased to rise when the hand of the altimeter pointed at four thousand. They waited tensely, in silence, while Stanton kept his eyes fixed on the illumined dial of his wrist-watch. The minutes dragged, and their nerves strained unbearably. Terril, invariably cool and collected in action, found the slow waiting an almost unbearable torture.

He drew a long breath of relief when Stanton at last reached out and threw the lever that released the balloon. The cable fell, cutting them off from the ground, and the gas bag shot up another six hundred feet with a sweeping rush that caused Terril to gulp and his stomach to flop over.

But the wind was lighter than Stanton had calculated upon, and the first red beams of the morning sun picked out the drifting bag before they had reached their objective. Glancing anxiously over the side, they saw, however, that the balloon was paralleling the lines and that it had not drifted across.

The two-men turned to look at each other in the growing light, and grinned with stiff lips, but there was a sort of exultation on Stanton's bleak countenance.

"Keep down, Dick," he said quietly. "There'll be Jerry ships nosing about here at any minute. When they come, heave a dummy overboard, but don't show yourself. And, Dick, if you happen to know any effective prayers, you might pray for luck and lots of it. We'll need it."

"Sorry," Dick grinned, "but my religious education's been neglected. I always just manufacture my luck as I go along." He broke off, for an archie

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shell had burst not thirty yards from the basket, the hot shards shrieking through the air, but missing the balloon. The ground was still in darkness below them, but the big bag was plainly visible against the lightening sky.

A moment later an entire battery whanged enthusiastically away at them, and the runaway balloon was engulfed in a shrieking, howling hell of bursting explosive, and jagged fragments of metal that sang vicious songs of hate in the aching ears of the two observers. Now and then a smoking shard slashed through the basket within inches of the two men, and Stanton crouched over the dummies as if to shield them with his own body.

Terril's face twisted in disgust, and his red hair seemed to bristle. "That's the hell of being a balloon corps man," he yelled above the infernal din of the crashing shells. "You're unable to fight back. You just have to sit and take it."

Stanton looked more like a bulldog than ever, for his temper, never very far beneath the surface, was beginning to flare.

"You'll damned well see whether a balloon man can fight or not," he snapped. "We'll soon be over Harcourt and—down, Dick! There's a Jerry ship coming!"

Terril peered through a loophole to see a lone Fokker thundering down to intercept them. With the Mercedes gunned to a hammering, driving roar, the plane swept down upon the helpless balloon, circling about it, the pilot evidently puzzled to find it adrift. The ground batteries had been left behind, and the German suddenly came slashing in, tracers and incendiary bullets curving from the gaping muzzles of his Spandaus.

THE first dive missed, and as the Fokker veered around in a vertical bank, the two observers fastened the parachute harness to one of the dummies and cast it over the side without showing themselves. Through the loopholes they watched the silk rip loose from the cone and blossom out above the dummy. The German, on the point of diving upon the balloon again, changed his mind and thundered at the figure dangling beneath the parachute.

But already Harcourt was just ahead

of them, and as Stanton peered eagerly out across the lines, he forgot the menace of the German, forgot everything, in what he saw. Although everything was carefully camouflaged, he could see that batteries were being massed back of the lines, their movements half-concealed in the cloud of dust that rose. Troops were coming in, and hundreds of great armored tanks were drawn up in ranks. The Germans were preparing for a surprise attack at the weakest and most strategically important point in the Allied lines, while at the same time they were quite obviously faking an attack at another point. But this was the real thing.

"Good God!" Stanton breathed, his eyes gleaming. "No wonder the whole Jerry air force is out to prevent observation. Get to work, guy!"

He thrust the metal-bound book and a pencil into Dick Terril's hands, leaned over the side, and dictated swiftly. His trained eyes noted the approximate number of troops, batteries and tanks, and their positions, and he retailed the information in short, jerky sentences, while Terril set them down.

But even as he wrote, Dick was watching the Fokker below them as it dived furiously upon the dummy. The first attack missed, but the pilot veered his plane about and slashed in again, holding his fire this time until he was at point-blank range and could not miss.

The twin Spandaus bucked and flamed, and Dick's eyes almost started from his head as the dummy seemed to fly into a thousand fragments. There was a deafening concussion that caused the balloon to rock violently, and the Fokker was going down in wild, erratic swoops and spins with prop shattered and a segment of a wing dangling. Dick turned and stared at Stanton in amazement, and Buck grinned back at him.

"Who said a balloon man couldn't fight back?" he demanded. "That dummy of mine was stuffed with a hundred pounds of H. E. I'm probably the first balloon man to bring down an enemy plane!"

Dick gulped and rose hastily from where he had been sitting on the remaining dummy.

"And I've been sitting on a hundred pounds of sudden death!" he muttered,

eyeing the figure with respect. "Buck, I don't mind dying, I don't even mind a mess of incendiary bullets in my guts, but if it's all the same to you, I'd just as soon stay in one piece when I wash out. And I might mention, if it's any interest to you, that there are three more Fokkers coming over to play with us, and we've just got one dummy left."

Stanton nodded, his eyes gleaming with triumph. "It's our end, kid," he said evenly. "Throw that book over; the job's finished. We'll jump, but we'll never know it when we hit the ground."

He hesitated, then slapped the other man on the shoulder with a violence that nearly knocked him overboard. "You're a great guy, Dick," he said gruffly. "See you in hell!"

Dick nodded, cast one glance at the oncoming Fokkers, and sailed the metal book into space. As he did so, a heavy gust of wind caught the balloon, it swayed outward, and the cord which was fastened to the book, neatly looped itself over the hook on the bottom edge of the basket!

FOR a single moment Captain Stanton's fighting face went black with rage as he saw all their work lost. They were to sacrifice their lives to no purpose, for the balloon would either be blown up or drift out over German territory. Then he grinned, a twisted smile that showed his agony more than anything else could have done.

"Not your fault, old man," he croaked. "Just tough luck, that's all."

"But it was my fault," the redhead groaned. He cast another look at the three Fokkers that were almost upon them. "I'll get that book, Buck, and all hell can't stop me!"

In feverish haste he slipped into the straps of the parachute, ripped the silk loose from the side of the basket, and perched himself on the rim.

"Take hold of the chute, Buck," he commanded, "and lower me till I reach it. Then let me go, and jump. We might be lucky enough to reach the ground without being shot."

With renewed hope brightening his bloodshot eyes, the captain caught the heavy silk, and as Dick Terril released his hold, he lowered him slowly. The wind was rising now, and the basket

pitched and tossed in the air currents, causing Terril's body to crash sickeningly against the basket. He set his teeth in his lip until the blood spurted, fending himself off with hands and feet as best he could, and a moment later he reached the dangling book. By that time, however, the cord had become twisted firmly about the hook, and he tugged at it frantically, losing precious time, until the three Fokkers swirled about the bag. But he did not even glance at them. Not more than five minutes away, the trenches curved sharply in, and the bag would pass out over German territory.

For a moment the three enemy ships swirled about the balloon in ever decreasing circles, the pilots evidently trying to ascertain what was happening. Finally one of them dived to come up beneath the basket. Less than fifty meters below, he hung his ship by the prop, pressed the triggers, and sent twin streams of smoking incendiary bullets tearing and slashing through the basket.

Closer and closer came the leaden death to Dick Terril, but he was utterly engrossed in trying to free the book and he did not even glance aside when the bullets raked his legs, sending hot chills of agony through his body. But Buck Stanton knew that the finish was only a matter of minutes, and bleak failure was staring him in the face.

With a swift movement he twisted the silk of the parachute in the rigging, and held it there with his knee pressed against it. Exerting an almost superhuman effort, he caught up the remaining dummy and tossed it across the rim of the basket. Coolly now, although he knew that bullets might at any moment smash into the dummy or the gas bag and blow them into oblivion, he waited and calculated his chances.

Judging the distance he suddenly pushed the dummy off into space and watched it fall straight into the whirling disk of the Fokker's propeller. The German had no time to throw his plane over on a wing and escape. The dummy struck, the nitro-dynamite exploded with a devastating concussion that in turn exploded the Fokker's gas tank, and Dick Terril felt his body lifted on the force of the explosion and hurled against the basket.

WHEN he had stopped swinging, the blood was gushing from his mouth and nostrils, but he essayed a sanguinary grin.

"Two down for the balloon corps!" he yelled. "Keep it up, Buck, and you'll rate as an ace yet. Hold everything, old man; I've about got it."

Streaked with blood, and with his mop of red hair singed to the scalp, he tore persistently at the book that meant the difference between success and ignominious failure. The bend in the lines was just ahead of them, and he had to work fast. But the other two German pilots, though apparently dazed at the mysterious fate of their companion, were diving upon the balloon.

A Fokker came reeling down from the sky, tracers hissing from hot guns, and the pilot did not pull out of the dive until his trucks raked the top of the big balloon. The bullets did not take effect, and he sheered off, zoomed, and was ready to attack again.

The other plane came hurtling down just as Terril yelled in triumph. The book had come unfastened, and he hurled it far out into space, watching it as it whirled earthward, the sun glinting on the metal covers. He saw that it would land safely in Allied territory, and he looked up at Stanton with a grin.

Stanton promptly released the silk and saw his friend shoot downward. With a last glance at the Fokker that was pouring bullets into the bag, he slipped into his parachute harness and jumped. He knew that the German would get him, but at any rate it would be better than being blown up with the balloon. He went hurtling down, head over heels. What he had expected happened.

Boring in to close range, a Fokker stitched a double row of holes along the length of the bag, then veered hastily away to escape the inevitable explosion. The gas bag let go with a concussion that sent hot fingers of flames stretching high into the air. A blast of superheated air caught Stanton and hurled him through space like a feather, scorching his face to a crisp and half stunning him with its force. For a moment the heat was so intense that he thought he had landed in hell

—and it was hotter than he had expected.

But the jerk of the opening parachute did not come. Looking up dazedly, Buck saw it streaming above him like a ghostly, crooked finger. The concussion from the balloon had twisted cords and fabric so that it had not opened. He did not believe that there was a chance it would untwist in time to save his life.

The Fokkers had escaped the concussion and they were diving upon the two helpless men. Captain Stanton saw that Terril had been hurled aside also, and was almost directly beneath him. Thousands of bits of burning fabric from the balloon were raining down out of the air, and as Stanton went down, he saw to his horror that they were lighting on Terril's chute and eating holes in it. Another instant and the man would be crashing down to the earth to his death.

Stanton swore impotently, and cast a despairing glance at his own chute, which was twisting and writhing above him, refusing to open. He was rapidly overtaking the other man in his descent. Dick had declared himself in on the job merely out of friendship, and now Stanton must watch him die horribly just when there had seemed a possibility of escape. Already the chute was being consumed on one side, and Dick was going down in a fast and erratic sideslip. But not as fast as Stanton.

A FOKKER roared at the captain and missed. The two men were within a few yards of each other now, and Dick looked up, grinning gamely in the face of death, although his countenance was drawn and strained almost unrecognizably.

They were even now, and Stanton shot out iron hands, catching the red-head closely in his arms as his body swung out in a swirling arc. He was never quite certain why he did it, but hope died hard in his fighting heart, and there was a thousand to one chance his chute would open in time.

"Cast loose, Dick, for God's sake, cast loose!" he yelled above the rush and roar of the wind about their ears. Although he did not comprehend, Terril ripped away the harness and saw his flaming parachute go streaming down

the wind. It looked as if he were flying on red wings of fire.

Locked close together, the two men hurtled down, turning slowly over and over in the air.

Time after time a Fokker dived after them, knowing that they had observed the activities across from Harcourt, but they were falling so fast that the streams of bullets passed harmlessly above them. And still Stanton's parachute did not open. It might never open, but it was their one slim chance to live. It lashed and twisted mockingly about them, and he cursed it with oaths that the wind whipped soundlessly from his writhing lips.

It had seemed an eternity since the two men began to fall, but only seconds had elapsed. During those seconds, the chute had been slowly untangling. And now it snapped open.

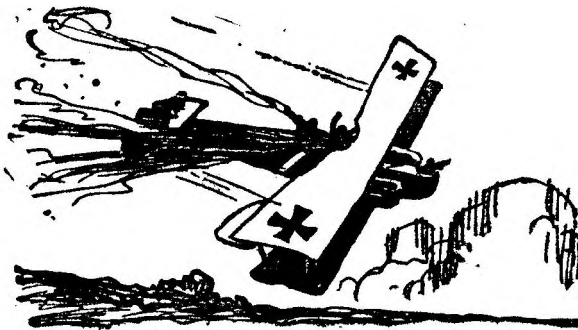
A split second later the two men struck the ground with an almost stun-

ning impact, but the parachute had saved them from death. They had missed landing in No-Man's-Land by two hundred meters.

A few hours later, Stanton and Terril were back in the operations office, their burned faces and hands heavily bandaged, but they were otherwise little the worse for wear. Their report had been dispatched to Wing. Terril was painfully trying to roll a cigarette when an orderly brought in a long, official-looking envelope and handed it to Stanton.

"More unadulterated Hades from Wing, I expect," he grunted.

"They haven't received my report yet. Those babies at H. Q. have finally decided that observation over Harcourt is impossible, and I am hereby ordered not to attempt it again. And now I suppose I'll rate a court for accomplishing the impossible. Oh, well! What a life, Dickie! But we can take it!"



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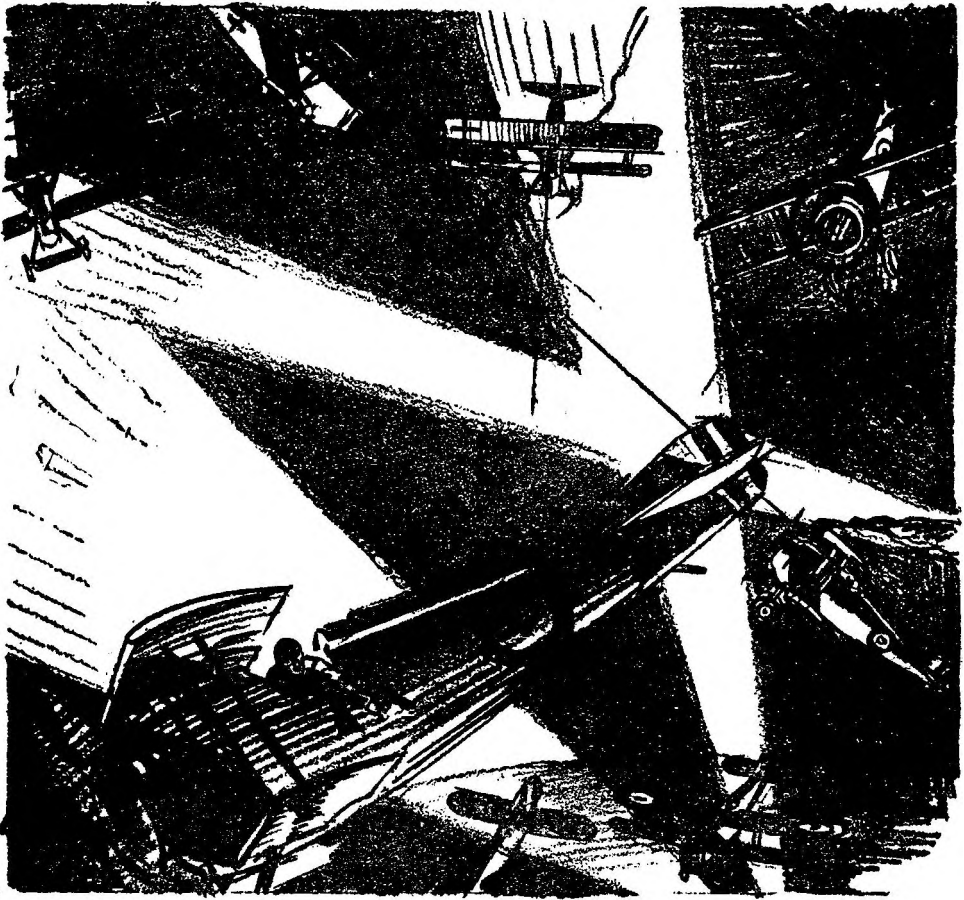
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Sky-Man Swap

By LIEUTENANT S. G. POND

Rittmeister von Ribberhoffer's first eighty-two victories were easy. But the eighty-third was different! It meant more than all the others to that great German ace for—that victory spelled defeat!

RITTMEISTER Freiherr Karl von Ribberhoffer's pale gray eyes were like frozen slits of steel glinting down his twin Spandaus. The French Spad ahead hurtled toward him, head-on, with the screaming speed of a cannonball. Confidently, fearlessly, Ribberhoffer's hands, white, seemingly bloodless, held the control stick of his Fokker.

His feet were like automatons on his rudder bar, motionless. For a grim, hell-howling second the Spad and the Fokker threatened to telescope one another. Vickers bullets crackled through the linen over Ribberhoffer's head, speeding into the blue with dismal whine. He seemed unmindful, patient, watchful.

In that streaking second he sucked in his breath with a sharp, hissing

sound. The Spad veered ever so slightly—to the right. Ribberhoffer's Spandaus chattered belching, scarlet death. The Spad flung up and over on her back like a stricken bird, a wisp of yellow-black smoke curling from out her bright belly; a tongue of flame licked the blue. In violent explosion the doomed ship blasted into the skies in a shower of wood debris, steel and flaming fabric.

Flinging his vision to his left, Ribberhoffer recognized a dark shadow near by. Avariciously he stared. It was another Spad, another kill!

But this Spad was somehow different. Its pilot was standing, working vigorously over his guns; they were obviously jammed. Two emerald streamers whipped back from his flying struts; this was a squadron or at least a flight-leader. Too, there was something unusual about the pilot. He was unconcerned about Ribberhoffer's presence!

The great German ace laughed the wild, demoniacal shriek of the gladiator whose arena is splashed with the blood of victorious conquest. "Bring them down flaming!" That was the slogan of the greatest of all his great masters, the yet unconquered Richthofen!

This was what he, Ribberhoffer, was doing. He had just chalked off his eighty-second victory. But it was too easy; it was like being a kingbird swooping down the blue sky lanes after insects, thus vanquishing the untrained Spads of the enemy! Hungrily, with a deep rumble of disgust in his throat, he glared into other regions of the skies for a fresh kill, but a hard one, a difficult one. His primitive blood lust had become surcharged; his very soul was plethoric, hungering for something solid in which to sink his teeth.

This limping, nonchalant Spad on his left? Again he stared across the bright wing of his Fokker shining in the clear morning skies. Below he vaguely glimpsed his two conquered Spads smoldering in the shell craters of No-Man's-Land. With cool fingers he spiraled over on a tight cartwheel toward his opponent. The pilot of the Spad, still standing, spiraled off on a similar cartwheel. Ribberhoffer blinked. The enemy had been standing; he had, then, controlled his Spad with his toes and his knees!

Ribberhoffer did a climbing turn to get above and behind his enemy.

Enough of this! He would polish off this smart Frenchman at once! It would make his eighty-third victory. He was anxious to pass the hundred mark; it would mean another decoration from the Kaiser. On the top of his climbing turn he stared down, ahead, and below where he expected to find his third Spad, but instead he saw only—space!

A FROTHY curse on his lips he stared upward. *Verdammt!* What was this? The Spad was still above his left wing tip with advantage! The Spad pilot continued standing! More, he was leaning out his pit, shaking his fists at the German ace. Ribberhoffer sucked in his lips with an incredulous whistle. Was this enemy ace trying to make an ass of him? Trying to make a buffoon of the great Ribberhoffer? *Schrecklich!* He would show him!

Ribberhoffer swirled into a double roll, swept out onto a half Immelmann, and rocketed up into another climbing turn—only to find his opponent still duplicating his every movement, and still flying right there above his left wing tip just the barest margin beyond the range of his death-dealing Spandaus. It was maddening.

Ribberhoffer was seeing red; further, he was sweating blood. Here was a kill, to the German ace, obviously an easy kill as were all enemies, but he couldn't quite get his guns into play. It was a new sensation for the great Ribberhoffer. The Spad pilot again stood in his cockpit, bowed, and waved a friendly farewell to the German. Then he coolly turned his tail directly to Ribberhoffer and swung off for the Allied lines.

A strange light flooded Ribberhoffer's eyes. He felt an undefinable element in the smile of his adversary. It snapped something deep within him, something intangible. It was as though he had been unfairly robbed of the viciousness to make his great strike—to kill! There was something warm, friendly, and compelling in that smile of the enemy's; it was new to the heart's experience of the German. The gall, for the moment, departed his hot veins. He watched the bright Spad intently, but with an interest new in his war history.

Serenely, the Allied Spad sailed over No-Man's-Land toward the Allied

interior. Ribberhoffer, eyes wide, a queer gnawing emptiness tugging at his heart and body, debated his course, oddly. This friendly enemy?

Suddenly he jerked his head up toward the clouds with the airman's veteran dread. Dark shadows—the shadows of wings—had raced across the face of the sun, blotting out the brightness. Five gray demons from a floating cloud. Five pairs of Maltese crosses on the wings of catapulting, sleek Pfalzes!

In a trice the five were circling the Spad, hemming it in. Only for a second did Ribberhoffer hesitate. And then what possessed his soul to undertake this new move he himself would have been at a loss to understand, much less explain, but he swept up as close to the Spad as he was allowed to get, then he stood in his own pit, motioning the enemy pilot to swing back for the German lines. The Spad fighter understood; he realized he was trapped.

Simultaneously a line of white smoking tracers seared out from one of the Pfalz fighters onto the tail of the Spad and started eating its way up along the fuselage toward the pilot's seat. Ribberhoffer flung his Fokker on its side and rushed in to the deadly gun fire of his own comrades, cutting it off from the lone pilot.

One after another the darting, weaving German fighters withdrew to a respectful distance, silent wonder and awe on their faces as they watched the well-known Fokker DR-1 of Ribberhoffer's protect and guide the captured Spad across the lines to Germany.

SIX German fighting planes behind a lone Spad rumbled across the stubbled airdrome at Junglinster, and the lair of the Seventy-seventh Boche *Jagdstaffel*. From out of the doorways of hangars, of machine shops, and barrack rooms Prussians, Bavarians, and Rhinelanders thrust excited faces and wide, astonished eyes as they saw the French Spad taxi up to their tarmac.

Ribberhoffer dropped quickly from out his sleek Fokker, shoved back his goggles and helmet from his face, revealing silver, almost white hair. In agile steps he ran to his captured prize, roving eyes over the new beautiful Spad camouflaged with vivid, stabbing colors.

At the side of the Spad's pit he exclaimed in French, "*Bonjour, mon ami de veine infernale!*"

The pilot of the French Spad lifted off his emergency belt with a sigh. A sardonic, hard-bitten smile played around the corners of his mouth as he answered, "Hello! But not such 'damned bad luck'—to have my life saved by Germany's most honored living ace."

The sharp, chiseled jaw of Ribberhoffer's did not snap down with its usual hardness and frigidity. For the moment he was still more inclined to forget the grim game of war, of bloodlust, and the scarlet kill.

"So!" he commented lightly. "An Englishman, eh?"

"Guess again," smiled "Chick" Wesley, the pilot of the Spad. "I'm a Yank. Right from Champaign, Illinois."

Ribberhoffer stuck out his palm.

"To my first American prisoner—to my knowledge! I am honored with a gallant fighter and an amazing pilot."

Wesley grinned and accepted the outstretched hand philosophically.

"Thanks, old top. But believe you me, you're no backstairs flyer yourself when it comes to acrobatics. Boy! You sure handed me some tight moments upstairs." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder significantly as he dropped to the ground some thirty miles behind the lines in Germany. "Well, I suppose it's soup and black bread for me, for the duration of the war," he finished dourly.

"Not exactly!" denied the German. "You shall be my personal guest, eating in my *Jagdstaffel* messroom, and tonight you shall accompany me to my favorite beer garden in Kehl,—in Kehl, my home town, where my brave fighters of the sky rule the city."

"Yeah?" smiled Wesley dumbfounded. "Well, now, that sure does sound *magnifique!* Not such a hell of a war, after all!"

They walked, then, down the edge of the airdrome to low barracks. Up a narrow path they approached a door on which there hung a sign reading:

"*Rittmeister Freiherr von Ribberhoffer,
Kommander Des Jagdeschwaders.*"

Kicking open the door, Ribberhoffer bade Wesley enter. The quarters were the usual military thing of cots, trunks, flying equipment, and family pictures hanging here and there on the wall.

"Make yourself comfortable," said Ribberhoffer. "I must give in my report of your capture."

He strode to the phone and in German held a heated conversation. Turning to Wesley when it was over, he said in irritated tone, "Intelligence insists that I go to them immediately to make a detailed report about you. You see, being the first American prize, and being a squadron leader in addition, you are of considerable informative value to our espionage. Meanwhile I suppose they will send an Intelligence investigator to interview you," he smiled amusedly. "The usual questions. I must go now, for a short while." He hesitated thoughtfully. "No use to tell you, I suppose, that it would be useless for you to try escape. The grounds are thoroughly guarded; but it might damage your status as—my friend."

"Mm-m, yes. I—I understand," said Wesley quietly.

The German ace slipped out. He had barely gone when two Intelligence officers entered. They looked about them oddly, and seemed amazed and angered that there was no guard visible.

One of them, a tall, dark-eyed Prussian, said to him, "You are from Bar-le-Duc, Squadron 310, aren't you?"

"We will have to search you. *Handen hoch! Hands up!*" he continued.

Quickly the two Germans went through his clothing. Goggles, handkerchief—that was all—now Wesley suddenly gasped. For now out of his watch pocket was drawn a slip of gray paper. He dived for it in desperation. A heavy automatic pistol plunged to his heart with a painful jab. He was forced back.

The Prussian opened the gray, folded paper. It was a check made payable to Wesley's tailor in Paris—and it contained his signature. He cursed himself for having it with him. The Prussian watched him coldly, reading simultaneously the signature. Next he ran through a loose-leaf binder. He smiled finally, a confident smirk.

"Wesley, eh? Right!" he snapped exultantly. "Wesley—squadron leader in the 310th American Pursuit Group!"

Wesley did not know why the Intelligence officer should feel so elated about it, but his high spirits made Chick extremely apprehensive that nothing good would come from the discovery.

IN Bar-le-Duc that night, on the tarmac of the 310th, all ears were strained and all nerves were at the cracking point. Chick Wesley, ace of aces and beloved squadron leader, hadn't returned from patrol!

Not in weeks had such a tragedy struck into their midst. Now a deathly silence gripped them as the roar of an airplane motor cut the skies above. New hope sprang alive. It might be—

Twin orange-and-purple flares streaked down from the stars. And from the tarmac rose an answering green Very ball curving gracefully in its arc-like trajectory, throwing a lush emerald light over all the surrounding landscape. There was deep pathos and stabbing anguish in those meagerly hopeful signals. Tensely the men listened to the roaring engine, their hopes flagging; trained ears were quick to pick up the sounds of familiar motors.

Like a meteor the oncoming ship hurried over the Bar-le-Duc drome at less than eighty feet from the ground. A burst of white phosphorescent light glowed from the driving plane. Then it dropped waveringly earthward with incandescent sputtering.

For a second the floodlights of the 310th flared brightly, hopefully, then sank into blackness even blacker than before. In that second the strange plane rushed up and away, screaming over the hangar roofs toward the enemy east. For a fleeting moment they glimpsed the pale gray wings with Maltese crosses of the enemy.

With a splashing thud, bits of phosphorus splattered over their dark drome as a white message chute swirled down the night wind. A dozen eager hands rushed out onto the field for it. By the flarings of fitfully lighted matches they read the message:

JIMMY FRAZER,
Commanding 310th American
Pursuit Group,
Bar-le-Duc.

I am down in a corn field 2½ miles SSW of the Lundstrum Woods in Germany. A

friend will deliver this message; believe me when I say it.

Come yourself in a two-place Spad to pick me up at 1:30 this morning. You will see my disabled bus standing on the field for identification. Land close by. I will be waiting. This is no trap.

CHICK.

Fraser and his comrades studied the message with wide, amazed eyes and labored breath. There was no doubt about it, that was Chick's signature—but had the message been written under duress, under penalty of death? Who could say? It was a problem without an answer for them. Should they take a chance? What would you do?

TWENTY-SIX heavy lager beer steins clattered to the rustic wood tables within the Kaiserhoff Beer Gardens in the hub of Kehl. Twenty-six gay, youthful voices were raised in hilarious song. At the head of the long table, his face wreathed in smiles, stood *Rittmeister Freiherr* von Ribberhoffer, his own stein scintillating with frothing liquid, held high above his head, leading his "circus" pilots in song.

"Come on, *mein Jagdeschwaders!*" he shouted jubilantly. "*Glanzend! Glanzend!* Whoop it up! Tomorrow we fly. And—tomorrow!" He banged his stein to the great table with clattering gusto. "Who knows what tomorrow may bring?"

Chick Wesley downed his beer; it was good beer, and the faces around him were much the same youthful, gay, and intelligent ones which crowded his own mess twenty miles the other side of No-Man's-Land, or in his own home town at Champaign, Illinois. It was the war; he was philosophic; what could he do but make the best of the passing moments of his life?

A military messenger hurried into the gardens from the street entrance, dashing to the side of Ribberhoffer. Saluting, he spoke a few words to the leader of the famed circus. Ribberhoffer's face clouded; his eyebrows drew down in a dark scowl. He looked at Wesley a moment in troubled stare, then left the table, disappearing into a telephone room.

Wesley could not help wondering if any plot was afoot. The move startled him and somehow made him apprehen-

sive. He had every faith in Ribberhoffer, but he felt that the high officials of the Intelligence service might be endeavoring to put something over, unknown to them all. He had not liked the attitude of the Intelligence men that afternoon.

When Ribberhoffer returned, he seemed more subdued, yet a determined set of his jaw indicated to Wesley that he was holding to his own policy as he had declared himself.

Once more at the table, he threw off the outward attitude of uneasiness. He turned to his guest of honor again, raising his stein, saying:

"*Mein Freund, we go now. Tomorrow it is again the war. My brave Jagdeschwaders and I must have rest, but before we leave, a toast! Steben Sie auf!*" he commanded his pilots; all stood to their feet. "Here's to you, *mein* fearless Yankee fighter. Drink!" Steins clinked around. "And now," toasted Ribberhoffer somberly, "here's to my supreme triumph, my eighty-third victory—in friendship. Drink!"

IT was after one in the morning, under the stars in Germany, when the automobiles carrying Ribberhoffer, his guest-prisoner of war, and his circus pilots, swept down the road fringing the Lundstrom Woods. Whether it was inevitable fate or the merest whim of chance, who could say? Nevertheless Ribberhoffer's amazement was overwhelming when he saw five of his Fokker DR-/s drawn up in the secrecy of thickets in the wide field beside the forest road. Nearer the center of the field, he thought he saw an Allied Spad resting.

"*Sakrament nochmals!*" he exclaimed bewilderingly. "*Was ist los?*"

He commanded the driver of his car to halt. Next he swept the auto's strong movable searchlight across the field. Overhead, the night was cut by the roar of a powerful motor. Instantly every one recognized the strange ship to be Wesley's Spad, due to its unique camouflagings. Ribberhoffer let out a string of burning oaths. Then he turned to Wesley, now standing on the road beside him.

"It is a damned outrage!" he said bitterly. "But it's all the doings of In-

telligence. I give you my word, I would have no hand in it, so they went over my head."

"I believe you," replied Wesley quietly.

Through the searching spotlight beam a new shadow swept through the night, another strange Spad. For a second Wesley's blood ran cold. One of his comrades far across the lines, gambling with his life to try to save his! It was a trap, some meretricious scheme hatched by German Intelligence, he was sure of that! His thoughts raced back to the espionage officer and his lost check. He didn't know what had been done, but he felt he was somehow to blame for it.

"They've used me for bait!" proclaimed Wesley vindictively.

"Ja," admitted Ribberhoffer somberly. "Und those are my five Fokkers," he finished savagely.

The two cars carrying the *Jagdeschwader* pilots drew up in the rear. Curious voices filled the night air. Dark shadows flitted excitedly on the highway. The incoming Spad which had been searching the field for its approach rumbled across the dark field daringly. Ribberhoffer gasped.

"Herr Gott! These Americans, what nerve!" he croaked, and raced for the center of the field.

All the *Jagdeschwader* pilots shouting and vaulting over the roadway fence, raced after their *Jagdstaffel* leader breathlessly. Wesley joined the general mêlée. Lights flared up here and there. Hoarse commands ripped the air. A dozen rifles spat their sharp fire from the woods. The *Jagdeschwader* pilots fell back.

A score of German infantrymen suddenly appeared from various parts of the wood. Quite obviously the unexpected arrival of the circus pilots was throwing consternation and confusion into the Intelligence plot to capture the Allied Spad, probably for special espionage use.

The motors of the five waiting Fokkers now roared out their various bursts of power. The Spad, only landed, started again, immediately, a puff of orange-and-scarlet flame whipping out from her exhausts. Careening down the field, she threatened to decapitate a

dozen or more German soldiers rushing before its sharp wings. The entire field was now a seething bedlam of shouting tumultuous riot, mixed orders and of vindictive cross-purposes between Intelligence operatives and the pilots of the *Jagdeschwaders*.

WESLEY, for the moment left to his own devices, found himself standing obscured in a thicket beside one of the five secreted Fokkers, its engine turning over. Shadows hurried here and there around the waiting busses. Two of the outer Fokkers roared into the center of the field for a take-off simultaneously with the newly arrived Spad now making its escape.

Rifles continued sending their sharp, stabbing reports into the night. From somewhere a machine gun jibbered its rata-tata-taka-tak. Wesley saw Ribberhoffer leap across a light beam and drop into his Spad. One of his *Jagdeschwaders* threw the propeller and Ribberhoffer took off in a circular sweep after his Fokkers and the Spad. The entire field was now in panic. The Fokkers beside Wesley were taking off one after the other, down wind, down the field. He saw the last of the Fokker pilots dash to the side of the bus nearest him.

As the German pilot's booted toe struck the stirrup, Wesley leaped through the thicket, grabbed the protruding heel, gave it one of his experienced jiu-jitsu flips, sent the Boche spinning over onto his back, and before he could recover from his startled upset, Wesley had landed in the seat of the Fokker. The throttle shot full ahead. A dazed mechanic was bowled over by a hurtling wing. The shadow behind Wesley strove to leap up to catch him, but the wild Yank was away.

Barely a hundred feet from the ground, two driving Spads from seemingly nowhere dropped from the night and commenced pouring molten streams of lead over his fleeing Fokker. Two more Spads streaked over after the Fokkers just ahead. To his right came a horrible explosion as one of the Maltese-cross ships plunged into a black wall of trees.

Hedge-hopping, banking, and careening somehow across the country, Wesley dodged and ducked those Spad wasps until they reached No-Man's-Land. The

night was a boiling caldron of waspish, stinging demons. It was a nightmare. Over the lines the searchlights of both sides joined in the turbulent carnage. Down a long yellow beam of light behind Wesley came a roaring thing of death. Like a meteor of flame and flying cinders it passed under his Fokker by the barest margin. On the end of that gaudy streamer of flame raced a single Spad.

Wesley pulled up, rushing into a steep Immelmann—scarcely in the nick of time, as bullets whipped over him and tore up the linen across his center section. To be shot down by one of his own men—what a ghoulisn fate that would be! Racing down a great sweeping beam, he recognized his own Spad—S-1224. Behind it, right on its tail, was a Fokker!

Wesley saw Ribberhoffer stare back and point desperately to his German helmet. His ship was streaking earthward. Then, in a light-beam, Wesley saw why Ribberhoffer did not swerve from his course. His propeller was shattered! The Fokker behind was getting the bead on Ribberhoffer's Spad.

In that second Wesley threw his Fokker, its powerful Mercedes roaring full-throated speed, into a right bank plunging between the doomed Spad and the attacking Fokker. He heard deadly lead scream across his upper wing. A center flying strut crackled to bits. Then

together they dropped into a pit of obscure darkness earthward—down, down, down.

RIBBERHOFFER'S Spad careened across a wide meadow not far from Bar-le-duc. Right behind it was a trim *Jagdeschwader* Fokker. At less than an eighth mile distance a burning plane illuminated the entire countryside. Wesley leaped from the gray Fokker he was flying and raced to his own Spad. The air above was still a clamor with the jibbering rata-taka-taka-tak of death, and of wings, wings, wings shrieking to their final doom. Wesley reached Ribberhoffer's side. The German ace, scarlet blood matting his shoulder, looked up at Wesley, a wistful, hopeless expression clouding his face.

"And now," he said dejectedly, "it is to you I owe my life. And so—you will take me prisoner—for the duration of the war."

"Huh? You don't know Chick Wesley! Not me, brother! Quick! That wound? Is it serious? Can you hold out—for a half hour?"

"Ja! I could."

"Okay! There's your Fokker. Plenty o' gas. Feed it to 'er!" Wesley grinned dourly. "For one night—t' hell with th' war! And here's to you, Baron! Now and then you may recall your—eighty-third victory!"



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CREAM O'THEM ALL

A Dramatic True Story!

Flying Field Flare-Up

Ever since the World War, the annals of our air services have become increasingly illuminated with glowing stories of the thrilling exploits of our military airmen. These records tell of reckless rescue flights into isolated regions, of outstanding courage in balloon explosions, and of pilots who have ridden disabled planes to earth rather than abandon them to certain destruction. Here, however, is a real fact story of a different type, for it tells of Air Corps courage right down on the ground!

By COLIN KERR CAMERON



PROP ticking rhythmically as the Wright Whirlwind warmed up, the BT trainer stood out on the apron in front of the 20th Bombardment squadron's hangars at Langley Field, Virginia. And huddled down beneath the bomb racks of the ship, two dungareed soldiers were working with the aid of a flashlight.

"Boy!" blurted one, "I'll be all-fired glad when this job's done, Bill. It's bad enough for a guy to have to handle regular fragmentation stuff and incendiary bombs for a base pay of fifty-four bucks a month. But when he's got to fool around with experimental eggs like these things—well! I wish I'd stayed a grocery clerk. 'Strictly fresh farm eggs' is a whole lot safer!"

"You said it, Musser! Really, these eggs are only flares. But flares are *plenty* potent! And if anything should go wrong, your name'd sure enough be Musser—you'd be mussered all over the apron!" And Staff Sergeant Will Norris, chief armorer in the 20th—and, incidentally, the rottenest punster in the whole GHQ Air Force—grinned hugely at his latest joke.

"Go ahead and grin, guy," replied Wayne Musser, a three-striper in the 20th's armament section. "But it wouldn't be half so funny if something *did* go haywire with us almost sittin' on

the damn things right now. And you'd be the first guy to take distance, I'll bet—if you had a chance!"

Musser was right. It wouldn't be funny! For the two Air Corps noncoms were on a ticklish assignment that warm night. Six experimental flares were to be test-dropped that night—the first real test of that type. And the two soldiers had spent the whole evening checking and then setting and installing the delicate time fuses on them. Right now, almost standing on their necks for the job, they were fitting the odd-sized canisters into the bomb racks of the ship that was to carry them upstairs for the drop test.

When their part of the job was done, Musser and Norris would be all set to hit the hay. And the rest of the test would be up to the pilot who was to chauffeur the crate up through the ink to about 12,000. From there, he'd yank the toggles and let the neck-craning board of observing officers—who were even now drifting onto the scene—see what kind of pretty fireworks they'd make.

"Anyway, Wayne," commented Norris as his partner slipped the sixth flare into position, "this is the last one. So it won't be long, now."

"Right! And it looks like we're just in time, too. For here comes the loopy who's to jockey this nag starward. Guess he's all set to go, too."

"Evening, men!" The newly arrived officer ducked the whirling prop and hunkered down into the glow of the flashlight. "How're you coming?"

"Okay, sir!" Norris threw an informal

salute. "All we need do now, sir, is yank out the safety rings and we can turn you loose. That is, of course, if the other officers are ready to check on the flares."

"Right, sergeant. They're ready. So I'll hop in and give her the oncover while you pull those rings. And handle 'em easy! Nobody's quite sure just yet what these test-flares will do. All I'm hoping is that whatever they do, they do it *after* they've left the crate."

The lieutenant climbed into the office of the BT while Norris leaned closer with his flashlight to allow Musser better light in the pin-removing job.

"Y'know," commented Musser as he carefully withdrew the first safety. "I'd *still* rather handle 'heavy stuff' than this sort of junk. At least, if there's a slip of any kind, the big fellers'll blow you right straight to hell by the shortest route. But these things, packed plumb full of magnesium and whatnot, *sear* you to death before they disintegrate you. And somehow, I like the other best—seems cleaner, somehow!"

"Swell sense of humor *you* got, too, sergeant!" started Norris. "But—*Hey! Watch* that prop, feller!" Straightening while preparing to move over to the last pin-pulling job, Musser had *almost* stepped too far out from position. Startled, he poised to recover himself, and—

Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick . . . a metallic cadence was sharply audible beneath the whirring rhythm of the airscrew.

"What—what's that?"

"Why, it's—it's one of the flares! The fuse has cut in somehow. And—"

"Whew! And they're short-time fuses! We've got to get away before—"

"Get away, *hell*. If she ignites here she'll blow up the ship, the hangars, and probably kill half the crowd over there. We've got to cut it loose!"

Both men yelled out to warn everybody to scatter, then swiftly bent to locate the ticking flare.

"Here she is!" cried Musser. "Number Two! Shoot that light down here while I unlatch her, Norris. Come on—closer. Swell."

His fingers accustomed to working in difficult places, the armament man quickly released the holding shackles, caught the flare as it fell and cradled it, still *ticking* ominously, in his arms.

"Gangway, guy!" He dashed out to-

ward the center of the flying field. Back near the hangar, officers and mechanics were scattering like sheep. One clear-headed pilot yanked on a fire alarm hook, and bells started clanging in every building.

Musser, with the bulky canister in his arms, made thirty feet in almost nothing flat. Realizing again the shortness of the fuse, he stopped, raised the flare to throw it farther, and—

A lightning burst of flame. A thudded *whoosh!* The entire area was illuminated with all the fires of hell. Smashing Musser to the ground, the flare left his upflung arms and rocketed right back to the BT trainer.

Here, it fell beneath the left wing. And so terrific was the heat from the vesuvian runaway that the wing and part of the fuselage promptly burst into roaring flame.

So far, the pilot had remained in the cockpit. Mindful, however, of those newly filled tanks within a few inches of the flame and five more flares below him, he dived hurriedly to the ground, *stumbled*—and fell with a snapped ankle almost beneath the flames.

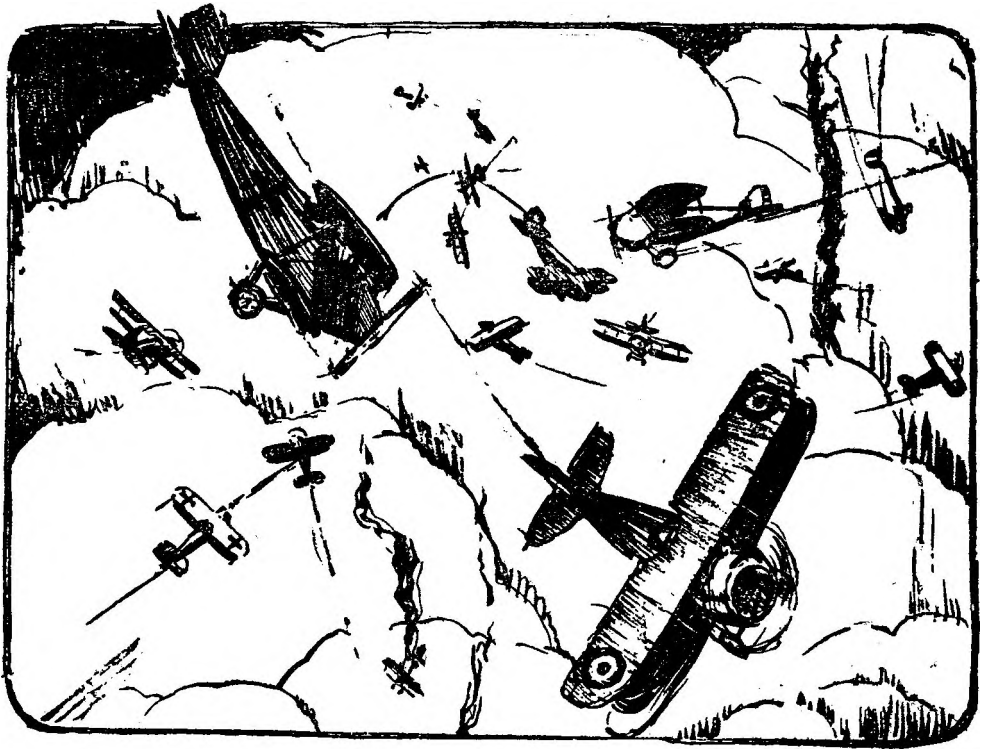
Officers and enlisted men recklessly rushed to his rescue. Norris and Musser—the latter now recovered from his forcible contact with the tarmac—reached him first. And half-carrying, half-dragging him, they yanked him out to safety just as the second explosion of the evening—the gas tanks—jarred the entire post.

By that time, the Langley Field fire and crash trucks and other emergency equipment were sirening to the scene. And with but little further damage, the fire was quickly extinguished. The BT pilot and Musser were rushed to the post hospital, the pilot for his ankle injury and the armament sergeant to receive treatment for the burns suffered when the flare exploded in his arms.

AND so in January 1938, at an impressive ground-and-air ceremony in which all Langley Field troops, planes, and pilots participated, Brigadier General Henry C. Pratt presented to Staff Sergeant Norris and Sergeant Musser the greatest peacetime award of our Army—the Soldier's Medal for heroism.

For soldiers and heroes they had proved themselves to be. Happy landings *always*, Sergeants!

Gun thunder filled the air as the Fokkers smashed into the midst of the Allied ships.



The Right to Fight

By WILLIAM E. BARRETT

Down below, men were dying in droves as the Allied ground-strafters went into action. And above, five Nieuports were drifting lazily. But from idleness they snapped into machinelike life, thrusting long lances of light through that soupy-sky. Those lances were pointed with death—for the Fokkers of Count Otto von Hecht had arrived!

MORNING, Duffy! Shoot me the important stuff and I'll look it over. Just time before patrol."

His mouth half full of toast and a mug of steaming coffee in his hand, Jack Lannigan settled himself behind the desk of his private sanctum. By virtue of his splendid record with the British, prior to the entry of the United States into the war, Lannigan had been given command of the 97th Pursuit Squadron. The manner in which he commanded it was dis-

tinctly his own. H.Q. was in a state of constant despair over the manner in which he handled his paper work, but the squadron was getting results. Lannigan both flew and fought, and he taught the rooks to follow his example. If he was a total loss at a desk, he admitted it cheerfully—and what of it?

Today was typical. He dismissed with grunts or terse comments a round score of communications that dealt with projects dear to the heart of H.Q. Not till he

came to a terse communique near the bottom of the pile did he show more than perfunctory interest. That notice, however, brought him up straight.

"Glory be!" he exulted, "Here's a break, Duffy. They're sending us 'Boots' Baldwin."

The adjutant looked interested. "The chap who just escaped from Germany a while back?"

"Right!" Lannigan's eyes were gleaming. "But before Germany ever saw him on the ground, Duffy, they saw him plenty in the air. God's own pet design of a fighting man—Boots. Hell, yes!"

The rest of the mail staled on him. He lighted a meditative cigarette and read visions in the curling smoke. Boots Baldwin! A cocky kid in pink pants when he first saw him; one of the home guard, a Zeppelin-hunter—then France and the dark days of early seventeen. Boots on the hurricane deck of a romping D.H.2, the spinning incinerator. How Boots could romp that old pusher scout! Then the Sop Pup and bloody April! The kid had flown himself goofy and had taken on too many of the Baron's boys in one sitting. They'd spanked him down into Germany—but they hadn't kept him there. He was back and coming to the 97th.

"You'll see flying, Duffy. Plenty of flying. Boots is just about what these kids of mine need. He'll keep 'em on their toes."

He was fingering through the mail again. A square envelope brought a frown to his face and he ripped it open. His frown deepened as he read through the brief scrawl.

"LANNY:

I asked them to send me to your gang. I'm coming up, but don't expect much. I'll explain when I see you. Please don't spread the stuff. Keep me quiet.

Hastily,
Boots."

A sergeant stuck his head in the door. "Everybody ready and waiting, sir."

"Righto. Coming right out." Lannigan swept the pile of correspondence to the adjutant's corner of the desk and strode toward the door. Rangy, lean, long-legged, he slapped the side of his leg with his gloves as he walked. He was still frowning thoughtfully.

The hasty note was not like the Boots

Baldwin that he had known. Boots had always gone into new things with enthusiasm, with a boast on his lips and a swagger to his broad shoulders. He hadn't been addicted to writing notes in the old days and, if he had written them, they would have been filthy with brag and cheerful for all of it. This scrawl was apologetic, damn it!

WET mist hit Lannigan in the face as he crossed the apron. To the north and the west, the big guns were pounding, the heavy booming of the big stuff punctuated by the sharp bark of the 75s. It was the morning of St. Mihiel and the barrage had been blazing for four hours. Lannigan looked at his watch.

Fives minutes to five. The doughboys would be going over the top in five minutes! His face became grave. This was no routine hop this morning. History would be made beneath the wings of the Nieuports as they ranged above the first big American drive.

The four pilots of his flight were before him—dim, ghostly figures beside the tiny Nieuports. Lannigan checked them over with his eyes. Reed, Morse, Lee and Wade—good lads, all of them.

One after another, the others took the air behind him. There had been no need for last-minute instructions. They knew their orders. Two flights of French and another American flight had been detailed to the job of strafing the roads behind the German lines. Lannigan's little group was assigned the job of keeping the Germans upstairs while the strafe was going on.

The country beneath them lost identity as they swept on to the blazing lines. Ruined villages, fields, and farms—all were merged into a dirty brown canvas across which antlike figures struggled and fought and died.

The Vigneulles-St. Benoit road! Lannigan straining overside could see the choked mass of traffic, an endless stream of troops, guns and transport—all headed the wrong way. The Germans were in full retreat! Then he saw something else.

The road-strafters were going into action. Dragonflies of destruction, the Spads and Nieuports were diving on the choked roads. Gun thunder smothered the noise that they made and they appeared like shadow actors on a shadow stage—but men were dying in droves below there

where the shadows darted, thrust, roared away and returned.

Then came the Fokkers! Lannigan felt their presence with some sixth sense before he picked them out of the high gray sky. There were seven of them—blue-bellied shapes that flashed like goblins from the gloom. Nose down, they were roaring to the rescue of their countrymen in the road—and those countrymen must not be rescued. The German retreat must be a rout. Lannigan raised his hand.

As though released from some invisible barrier, the five Nieuports leaped away. One second they were light-winged ships that turned lazily, noses slightly raised—then they were long lances of light in a soupy sky, thrusting lances that sliced to the kill.

A FOKKER rolled out of Lannigan's line of fire and Lanny rolled with him. Again the tracer line thrust for the vitals of the foe. Close—but not close enough. The German dropped into a vertical and tried to lap the American. Lannigan laughed softly. This Fokker couldn't turn inside a Nieuport. Not today!

The German seemed suddenly to realize that he was losing ground in the mad merry-go-round of death. He half-rolled desperately out of the grim circle and Lannigan was on him like a flash. The Vickers bucked and flame ringed the American's muzzle. The tracer line leaped across the sky and held for a moment. The German leaped against his straps like a condemned murderer in the electric chair; the nose of his Fokker went up momentarily—then down. He fell, straight down and wide open to shell-pitted terrain below.

Lannigan, however, had no time to sort out his impressions of the combat. A veritable tornado of a German ship was coming at him down the sky—a ship that dived and spurted hot lead! Lannigan pulled over sharply and did a fast climbing turn that brought him head-on into the furious Fokker. He was pressing the trips as he climbed.

It was all too hurried and frantic for accurate shooting, and neither man scored. But Lannigan's face was grim. This man was no novice. He was a tough campaigner—a boy who knew the answers.

"He was mad when he jumped me or

I'd have smoked," he grunted. "Looked like a vengeance play. Maybe that lad I got was his buddy, or something."

Black crosses flashed in his sights and he had a brief, photographic glimpse of the other man's insignia—the mailed fist. His heart leaped. No wonder the man was good. He ought to be good after thirty victories! This was the famous Count Otto von Hecht of Prussia, a scalp worth getting if ever there was one.

Lannigan had gained nearly half a turn on his man now and his lips tightened. He was a little higher. Staking his whole game on one play, he sideslipped and let the Vickers roar.

For a moment he thought he had a kill; then the German rolled out of danger and the sky rained destruction. There were three Fokkers and a couple of Spads in the mad carnival that whirled in on the private fight. Lannigan swore softly and pulled out where he could see what it was all about. Von Hecht was lost in the scramble.

"Another dogfight, or what's left of one," Lannigan muttered. "Well, the hell with it! Where's my gang?"

He fired the washout signal and within a few minutes the second dogfight had been swept on somewhere by the swift rush of their own tactics. The sky was amazingly quiet—that unbelievable clear quiet that follows so swiftly on the heels of air action. Three Nieuports answered the signal, and Lannigan took them home. Morse had gone down, and three of the Germans had kept him company. The attack on the road had been uninterrupted.

THERE was a veritable battery of photographers and newspaper correspondents on the drome when Lannigan rolled in. Despite the fact that the drome was within twenty-five kilometers of the Front and that the battle of St. Mihiel was in full swing, the press had managed to get passes and transportation to follow the famous Russell Baldwin, the daring ace who had spectacularly escaped from Germany to join his countrymen in the war. It was a great story and the American people liked such stories. Besides, it was good for recruiting.

In the seclusion of his private sanctum, Lanny found Boots Baldwin himself. The man was thinner and paler than he used to be, and there was a haunted look in his eyes. Instead of the usual ribald

2A

greeting of the old days, Boots kicked a chair against the door and flopped into it.

"Lanny, I'm glad you got in. You've got to chase those fellows. They're hounding hell out of me."

Lannigan looked puzzled. Once upon a time, Boots would have gloried in this, would have drunk the whole newspaper crowd under the table if they annoyed him—and then put them to bed.

"What's the matter, Boots? Tell me." He sat down and lighted a cigarette. Boots waved his arm wildly.

"Everything's the matter. It's all a lie and a fake, Lanny. I've been jockeyed into something. I didn't come back to fight and I'm not a hero."

"What did you come back for?"

"To get away from Germany. Nothing else. It was a madhouse. Not enough grub. Too many coots." Boots shuddered. "All I wanted was to get away. And the fools insisted on believing I came back to fight some more."

Lannigan raised his eyebrows. "It's still a good war, Boots."

"Not to me. They told me I'd have to transfer to the Yanks to get out of the British. Then they told me I had to go to flying school again. Then, when I tried to get back to the States, they told me I was needed at the Front."

"And you said you wanted to come to my outfit?"

"Yes!" Baldwin's eyes were haunted. "It was a dirty trick, Lanny. I didn't have the nerve to tell them that I was yellow. I thought maybe you could cover me. But I know now that you can't. I'll just have to admit to everybody that the hero stuff is bunk—and go over the hill."

Lannigan looked at his old comrade thoughtfully. His defeat and imprisonment had done things to Boots Baldwin, but the public would be still more cruel to him if he didn't go on playing the rôle that he had once played so well. The question was—could he?

The lean squadron commander stood up and stretched his arms. "Let's go up and put on a fake fight for the boys, Boots," he said. "That will satisfy them for a while and get them off your neck. You'll feel better, too."

Boots shook himself. "I'll go up," he said hoarsely, "but you couldn't get me near the Front if you tied me to a wing. I never want to see another German."

Lannigan shrugged and led the way outside.

UP IN the gray sky, Boots waited for him—an easy victim for attack—lazy, drifting. Lanny roared above him and dropped down with a bull's-eye for the tail position. Even as he dropped, he realized that he would have had no target if this were real. The other Nieuport simply dissolved. It was a fraction of a second before he found it again, and now Boots was riding his tail.

For five minutes, Lannigan tried every trick in his book—tricks enough to take him through two and a half years of war—but Boots kept command of the situation until he tired of it; then he broke off the offensive and fought just as brilliantly on the defensive. There was a spark in his handling of his bus that showed he was at ease, at home in his element—yet the man claimed to be afraid.

Lanny broke off combat and dived for the earth. He had had enough of that kind of play. Like a meteor, the other Nieuport passed him and rocketed earthward. Lannigan held his breath as the man kept the nose of the little ship on a steep angle. Nieuports shed wings on such maneuvers—often.

Not this trip. Boots shot across the hangar with inches to spare, came over the field and capped his performance with a trick that couldn't be done in a Nieuport. Holding his nose high, he set it down in a stall landing, and not a wire snapped. Lannigan rolled in several seconds behind him, but Baldwin was already bulwarked in the sanctum. He was white and shaky once more.

Lannigan surveyed him with a grin. "I thought you were washed up, you gold-bricker!"

Boots shrugged. "I am. Don't kid yourself. I've lost something that I used to have."

"You're morbid, old son." Lannigan broke off as the roar of a heavy engine sounded over the drome. Baldwin, too, had heard it and he half-rose from his chair. Lannigan beat him to the door. "A German," he growled. "That's a Mercedes engine."

He raced out on the drome just as a Fokker dipped over the hangar line and shot the field. Over the middle of the drome, the German banked steeply and

a long streamer left the cockpit—a weighted streamer that unrolled as it fell.

"A message—about Morse, maybe." Lanny strode out toward the apron. An enlisted man had retrieved the cylinder and the German was corkscrewing for the clouds. A dozen pilots gathered around as Lannigan opened the cylinder and extracted the thin sheet of paper. He started with surprise and then wadded the paper into a ball and put it in his pocket.

"I'll read it at mess, fellows," he said. "It isn't about Morse. It's something else."

LANNIGAN was thoughtful and preoccupied for the rest of the day. Mess that night was distinguished by a feeling of tension in the air. When Lannigan rose, with a folded paper in his hand, the silence was a palpable thing—a thing of substance. He unfolded the paper slowly and kept his eyes from the brooding figure of Boots Baldwin.

"I have a challenge here from Count Otto von Hecht," he said slowly, "and, as is our custom, I have saved it till to-night." He paused a moment, then he read swiftly:

*To CAPTAIN RUSSELL BALDWIN,
Greetings!*

We in Germany dislike the manner of your going. I challenge you hereby formally to individual combat at 10,000 feet above Apremont tomorrow morning. If you wish the privilege of again engaging the pilots of Germany after having once been our prisoner, you should have no objection to fighting for the privilege. I will be at Apremont at 5 a.m., alone. And thus you may again win the Right to Fight!

*Saluting you,
VON HECHT, Hauptmann,
Imperial Air Force.*

There was a sharp gasp from Boots Baldwin, a moment of silence around the table and then a burst of comment. The pilots, proud of the new addition to their ranks and the publicity that he had brought the squadron, were already visualizing the drama in this situation. What a comeback it would be if, on his first trip over the lines in an American uniform, Boots Baldwin downed the great von Hecht!

Boots looked pale and drawn. He smiled feebly in response to the chaffing of the

crowd and looked bitterly at Lannigan. Lanny held his hand up for attention.

"This is rather a rush act on Captain Baldwin," he said, "and he's a wreck from dodging newspaper men, shaving in crowds and being pretty generally a freak to be stared at. We'd all like to see him off tomorrow, but we're not going to do it. I'm making a personal request that everyone here stay indoors tomorrow until five minutes past five."

Lanny walked out with his arm around Baldwin's shoulder. Boots turned on him fiercely as they stepped out into the night, away from curious eyes.

"That was a lousy trick, Lanny, I—"

"It's custom. Besides, it's a break. You're woozy about flying out with the gang — stage fright or something. This breaks you in gently. Give him what you gave me this afternoon and it's plenty."

Boots shook his shoulders angrily. "You just forced my hand," he growled. "And maybe that's just as well."

"Don't be a fool! Your personal honor and the squadron honor is at stake, Boots. And you can take him without half trying."

Boots Baldwin turned on his heel. "I'm jolly well going over the hill. Honor be damned! I'm sick of being jammed into things."

Jack Lannigan watched him go, with a smile on his face that he tried to make confident. Despite all of the arguments that he used on himself, however, he was conscious of a nagging doubt. Boots Baldwin had left something in the prison camps and the hospitals of Germany. The man who had been afraid of nothing was suddenly afraid of war—not of von Hecht or of the other Germans or of the ships or guns or anything specific, but just of the war.

"He'll come out of it," Lanny said to himself. "He'll get thinking it over and he'll get mad or something. Once he actually tangles with a German again, he'll want to do it three times a day."

THE wind was blowing gustily across the drome of the 97th in the dark hour before dawn. A shivering crew of mechanics fumbled around a Nieuport that was already set for the skies and waited for a pilot who did not show up. Jack Lannigan, taking for himself a privilege that he had denied, with good cause,

to his men, strolled out and stood for a second stiff-legged on the apron. He glanced at his watch with a worried frown and went inside.

"I guess Boots overslept, poor devil. He's been on the jump." He was trying to hum under his breath, but the hum died when he pushed the door open and stood on the threshold of Boots Baldwin's cubicle.

The bed was undisturbed. All too obviously, no one had slept in it.

For a long minute Lanny stood and stared at the empty room. He could hear that snarled threat of Boots Baldwin the night before. "You forced me to it. I'm jolly well going over the hill!"

Boots! The darling of the old R.F.C., the boy who had never asked quarter or questioned odds, the boastful, confident kid with the long line of notches in his struts—yellow! A deserter.

With a choke in his throat, Lannigan wheeled and started full tilt for the line. He was barking at the mechanics before he had reached the apron.

"Get out my ship. Quick. Keep that one warming up. Hurry, you snails!"

A thin, drizzly rain was falling now. A mechanic shuffled across the tarmac and touched his cap. "Your ship is ready, captain. What do you want us to do with the other one?"

Lanny pulled on his helmet and looked once more at his watch. "Keep it on the line for fifteen minutes," he said crisply. "Captain Baldwin has been delayed. At the end of fifteen minutes, put it away."

He climbed into the cockpit, and the Nieuport rushed into the stinging, mist-laden wind. The drome dropped off into the blackness that hugged the earth and Lanny flew to the pale light of dawn and that rendezvous at Apremont.

A solitary Fokker hung in the lightning sky at ten thousand. A black shadow in the pale light of early day, it looked like some huge bird of prey; a mad painter's dream of evil.

The droning beat of the rotary hammered phrases into his brain. Boots Baldwin—over the hill. Boots Baldwin—over the hill.

THE German wheeled far out and faced him, dipping his ugly, overlapped wings in salute. Lanny pulled even in altitude and returned the gesture. The two ships circled for advantage.

The courtesies were limited, and von Hecht was anxious to come to grips. Possessed of the faster ship, he roared to the attack. He was overeager, though, and fired too soon. Lannigan, suddenly cool with the demands of combat upon him, turned into him, climbing full gun with the protection of his engine in front of him. Von Hecht, carried far forward by the momentum of his dive, flipped over on his back. It was the shortest possible burst for Lannigan and he missed.

The two ships passed—but this time there was no salute.

They were both vertical now and cutting eights. Lannigan smiled grimly. Von Hecht was plenty pilot, but the Nieuport could turn inside of the D-7 if it were handled right.

The German was roaring down on him once more, staking everything on his speed. Lanny gave the Nieuport all that it would take and did two amazingly fast half-turns. Momentarily disconcerted, von Hecht found himself suddenly below his foe. He turned in the cockpit, his startled face gleaming white.

Lannigan had a flash of that white face, large in his sights. His hand closed on the trips—and nothing happened.

The American turned cold. He grabbed instinctively for the gun gear, and time seemed to stop in its march through the centuries to watch him die. The C.C. reservoir handle was down, and there was no pressure on the fluid.

No guns, and the best German on the Western Front thirsting for blood. Von Hecht, reprieved from almost certain annihilation, was quick to take advantage of that reprieve. He was on the Nieuport like a flash, and Lannigan felt the tracers biting past him as he half-rolled frantically, prolonging as long as he might the thin hold he had on life.

Von Hecht was rolling with him—a grim duellist whose only code was victory at whatever price it be. Fragments splattered from Lannigan's shattered dash as he strove to throw off those question fingers of Death.

Then a shadow fell across his wings and a new gun barked. Unbelieving, Lannigan stared back over his shoulder, and the blood flowed warm again in his veins.

There was another Nieuport—a flashing Nieuport that rode like the Angel

of Reckoning out of the clouds. It was on the German's tail, and von Hecht was no longer firing at Lannigan. Lannigan dived out of the death spot and came around.

FOR several seconds the Nieuport rode in the kill position, but the guns did not flame. The pilot seemed desirous only of registering his presence, then with a maneuver almost too fast to follow, he was clear and away. Drawn aloof, he faced the German across the murky sky and dipped his wings solemnly in a challenge.

"Boots!" Lannigan's breath came hard as he recognized the ship. Even as the recognition came, however, he realized the situation. Boots had scorned to kill, to take an unfair advantage. He was challenging now, and leaving it up to the German — if he wanted the challenge. Lanny drew farther off to the side, weaving lazy circles as he waited.

Von Hecht chose to fight!

Dipping an answer to the challenge, he roared to the attack. For a few seconds it appeared that Boots had not seen—or perhaps not understood. The blinding speed of the D-7 and the German's natural advantage of position brought him in broadside to the lazily banking Nieuport. Boots seemed to turn into the guns. The Spandaus muzzles flamed red.

And Boots wasn't there.

He simply faded out under the attack, and when the bewildered German wheeled around, Boots was behind him. It could have been over right then, but the Yank elected otherwise. The German hadn't seen the trick before and it was hardly sporting.

For five minutes Lannigan watched a classic of aerial combat; then in one squirming, flashing maneuver, Boots fastened himself to his enemy's tail, and his guns spoke for the first time. Von Hecht's Fokker jumped end over end like a hit rabbit and went whistling down the sky.

Above the place where he fell Boots Baldwin dipped a flying man's salute.

IT was a swaggering Boots that left the cockpit on the rain-swept dome of the 97th. There was a swing to his shoulders and a set to his gait that belonged on another front and in another

year. Lannigan grinned with appreciation.

"Nice work, kid," he said, "and thanks for the lift."

"Don't mention it. I liked doing it. Ever see me have so much fun?"

"Yeah, often." Lannigan's mouth twisted wryly. He was going to have to listen to a lot of brag now, and he'd probably have to take it out of Boots from time to time. His eyes gleamed.

"Where were you when the whistle blew?"

"Oh, that?" Boots flushed. "I was drunk, Lanny. I was so scared last night that I went down to the village and—well, I was still there with a bottle in my fist at five."

"And you didn't mean to go over the hill?"

"I don't know." The brag was out of Boots Baldwin now, and he was the man that few people saw. His eyes were grave. "I think I'd have quit rather than fly a patrol, Lanny. But that challenge was different—personal, somehow. I couldn't slack it. I tried, but I couldn't."

Lannigan sighed deeply. He didn't have to ask if Boots Baldwin would fly patrols now. He knew. His hand dipped into his pocket. "For a while, Boots," he said, "I was afraid I'd made a mistake. You see, I killed von Hecht's brother the day you landed here. Von Hecht tried to get me and—read that."

Boots reached out and took the thin sheet of paper. He read:

*Flight Commander, 97 Squadron,
Crossed Sabres insignia.*

Sir:

Our combat was terminated short of conclusion today after you had shot down my brother. May I have a chance to seek that conclusion tomorrow at ten thousand feet over Apremont? I will await you alone.

VON HECHT.

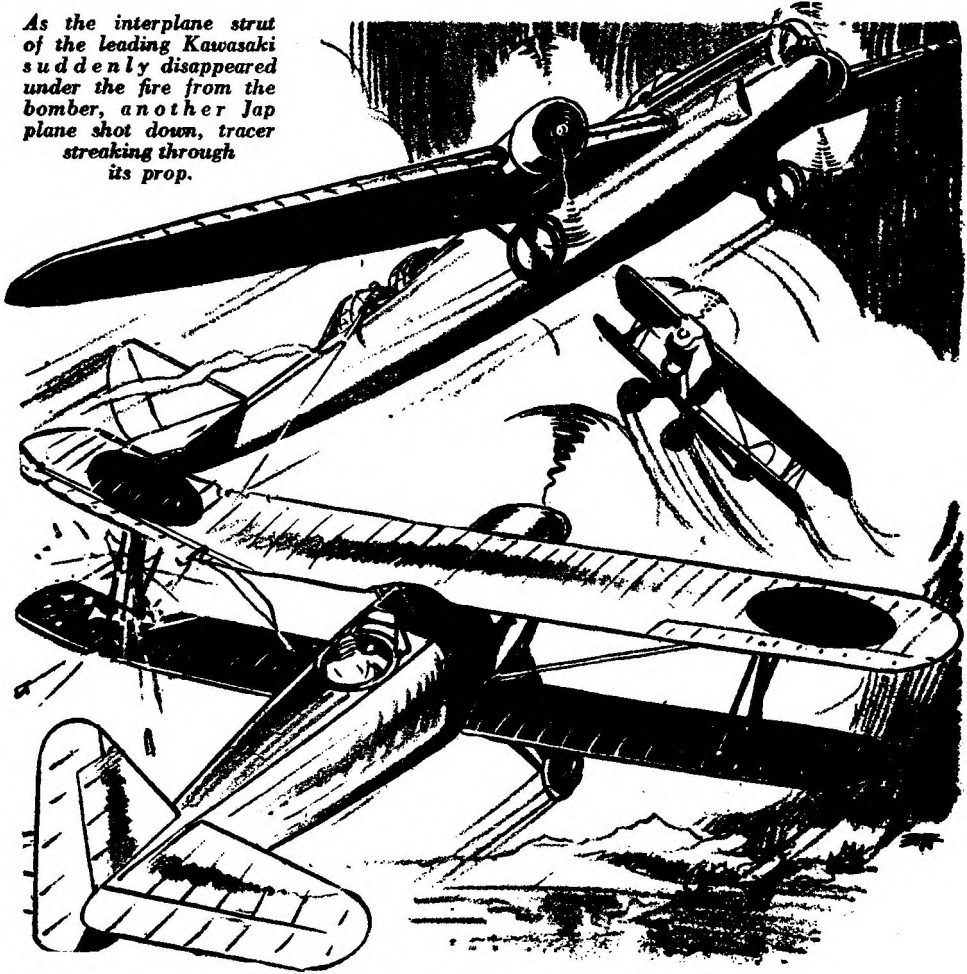
Boots looked dazed. "It was for you? I wasn't challenged?"

Lannigan folded the paper, "It was for me," he said softly. "And you were challenged. I challenged you when I scrambled the contents of the message. Sorry?"

Boots pulled the air into his chest with a rush, and the brag came back. "Hell, no!" he snorted. "Didn't I get me an ace? I can fight again—and—I'll buy a drink."

Boomerang Bomber

As the interplane strut of the leading Kawasaki suddenly disappeared under the fire from the bomber, another Jap plane shot down, tracer streaking through its prop.



By L. RON HUBBARD

They'd put him off the boat in Japan, thrown him in jail and seized his seventy thousand dollars' worth of crated American airplane because it was bound for China. Pilot Clint Ragen thought he had never been in a tougher spot. But he'd forgotten one thing—the Japs couldn't do much with an airplane unless they could put it together!

“**A** HOY down there!” bellowed Clint Ragen into the gaping hold. “What are you doing with that bomber?”

The blotchy-faced second officer glanced up, shrugged and turned to direct the hoisting of a large boxed assemblage. The winch started slowly,

went faster, and then, like a projectile, the box swooped over and thumped on the biggest concrete dock in Kobe, Japan.

Clint Ragen swore loudly and whirled to run up the ladder to the bridge. The liner's captain was waiting, evidently with prepared answers.

"What's the idea?" roared Clint. "You can't land that plane here. I've paid freight all the way to Shanghai."

The captain shrugged immaculate, blue-clad shoulders. "I'm not delaying my ship just for one piece of freight, Mr. Ragen, and although I realize that you should have been notified of this sooner—"

"Come to the point," snapped Clint.

"Just this. The Japanese have branded your bomber as being contraband of war, and we cannot sail unless we unload it immediately."

"Con—contraband of war!" Clint stared wide-eyed at the dock. "But they—can't do—"

The appearance of a small, frock-coated, gray-haired American stopped Clint's flow of words. Clint recognized Professor Alan Simpson, late of Kansas City, and a fellow passenger.

"My dear fellow," said the professor, "I would strongly advise your going down there to supervise that unloading. I saw the first crate splinter on the side." Simpson pointed with his umbrella and nodded, as though satisfied that he had done his duty.

Clint Ragen whirled on the captain again. "Damn it, man, you can't pitch that plane off here! Do you know that it's worth seventy thousand dollars? If I don't deliver it to the Nationalist government, I'll be fired. I'm responsible for it, and so are you. It's in your care as freight."

"Sue, if you want to," said the captain, wearily. "It would cost more than that to hold this boat up any longer. I'm already behind my schedule. You better see the Japanese authorities."

Clint took a deep breath and glared. His fists clenched and unclenched below the lower edge of his white jacket. Suddenly he yanked his Panama over his eyes and ran for the gangway.

"Those crates marked 'Engine'—" began Professor Simpson, before he realized that the pilot had gone. He turned to say something to the captain and found that he, too, had departed, in all his gold-braid magnificence. Professor Simpson lifted off his tinted glasses, wiped them, and moved to the rail.

CLINT RAGEN was trying his best to prevent damage to his expensive charge. The plane was crated in sec-

tions which were now being strewn aimlessly about on the concrete. Coolies stood by listlessly watching the performance, quite willing to lend a hand, but not knowing where to start. The pilot bawled at them in English, but they shook their heads, raised their eyebrows and remained standing idle.

Professor Simpson shouted something in a reedy voice, and the coolies glanced up. At another shout, they went busily to work, piling the crates neatly under the eaves of the shed.

Clint Ragen stood still in surprise and stared at the slight old man who had worked the magic. "If you speak this lingo—" began Chet.

"I'll come down," said Professor Simpson. "The guard is coming, and I doubt if any of them will be able to speak English or Chinese." He went carefully down the slanted gangway and came to a stop beside the pilot. Deliberately he wiped his glasses, replaced them and stared around him.

The last box swooped dockward in a net, to be deftly caught and placed with the others. Then the guard came up and clanked rifle butts to the concrete. The officer in charge was smartly uniformed. His leather shone, and his bristly hair stood straight up into his pill-box cap. A small pair of wings graced his chest.

The officer spoke rapidly to Clint, and when he had finished, the professor translated. "He says that this bombing airplane is contraband of war and has been seized by the Japanese government. He wants to know if you are the owner."

Clint stepped back and compressed his lips, his fists working. "Tell him I am the man who is responsible for the safe delivery of this bomber. And tell him that the U. S. will raise merry hell with the Rising Sun if anything happens to said U. S. property."

The professor spoke and received an answer from the officer. "You are in error," Simpson told Clint. "This bomber is intended for the Chinese government and is therefore war contraband. It is all very simple, Mr. Ragen. You have no alternative but to board the liner and leave your airplane here."

"What?" shouted Ragen. "Go away and leave seventy thousand dollars'

worth of airplane? Why, my company would kill me in cold blood. Do you realize that—oh, hell! I can't let myself be marooned here in Japan, and I've got to deliver that plane if I have to fight the whole Japanese Army. Tell him that and ask how in hell they knew it was aboard, anyway."

Professor Simpson, with quite a bit of editing, translated the message, and the Japanese flying officer became very stiff and stern. He frowned, but before he could open his mouth to speak, a whistle blasted above them, drowning out all other sound.

Clint Ragen moved one step forward, and then stopped. It was no use, now. The liner was already thirty feet away from the pier, and retreating faster every moment. The captain, afraid for his ship and cargo, had not waited, knowing that the outcome could be in only one side's favor—the Japanese.

The slight, gray-haired Simpson stood and trembled violently. Words quivered in his throat, but were never uttered. Professor Simpson knew that he had been marooned without baggage or passport. Slowly, the professor turned his lined face to Clint.

"My passport!" he finally said. "My baggage! I will arrive in Shanghai too late to join my Gobi expedition. I am a ruined man, Mr. Ragen!"

Clint Ragen, though worried over his own troubles, was instantly sympathetic. "I'm sorry about that. It was I who brought you down here. See here, Simpson, I've got some money with me, and you're welcome to as much of that as you need. They won't raise the devil with you for not having a passport. Not you, they won't. I always carry mine right with me."

"I forgot mine," grieved Simpson. He patted a binocular case on his hip, and hefted his black, folded umbrella. "These are all the baggage that I have."

The pilot pushed a twenty-dollar bill in Simpson's hand and sighed deeply. "Tell this monkey to take me to some officials. I want to talk with somebody high up, and I want to see the U. S. ambassador."

Simpson jabbered rapidly, listened closely, and then said, "You cannot communicate with your ambassador because he is not available. The only officials to whom you may speak are the

high officers of the air force. I would suggest—"

"Tell him to take me to that outfit," said Ragen. "And tell them to post a guard over these crates. We'll find out whether or not a bomber is contraband."

BARON SUGA sat high upon a raised platform and studied the Americans who had been brought in before the impromptu court. He saw that one of the foreigners was tall, blond, dressed in a soiled duck suit and Panama hat. From this man's bearing, the Japanese officer knew that he had here a military personality. Of the other foreigner, the baron understood that he must be one of great learning and dignity.

Looking up, Clint Ragen understood in his turn that something was about to go hard with him. In the polished yellow faces he saw neither mercy nor compromise. Nevertheless, his lean features bore a somewhat insolent expression. Clint Ragen considered himself quite up to any situation which might arise, and in spite of the braid on the baron's uniform, Clint Ragen knew he faced only a man.

Baron Suga leaned forward and spoke in clipped English. "Your name is Ragen. You are a pilot. You were formerly a captain in the United States Army Air Service. You intend to deliver a bomber to the Chinese and then fly it for them."

Some of the insolence went out of the pilot's face. His sea-blue eyes shifted warily, and he thought to himself that Japanese Intelligence must be very thorough to know all that about one man.

"The bomber," continued Baron Suga, "is, according to an ultimatum issued recently, contraband of war. Your act in delivering it to the Chinese may be regarded, for our purposes, as unfriendly. Why did you not accept it as such and proceed with your vessel?"

Clint Ragen shoved his hands deep into his coat pockets, and shifted his weight to his right foot. "Because said vessel ran off and left us," he said curtly.

"And this man with you," said the baron, bowing respectfully toward Professor Simpson. "Why did he find it

necessary to accompany you before this aviation board?"

"Because my ship left me," stated Simpson, removing his glasses and wiping them, squinting his eyes the while. "I know nothing of Japan. I have no friends here."

"And yet," snapped Baron Suga, "you speak Japanese."

"I learned it in Kansas," apologized the professor. "I had a servant boy who was Japanese, and he taught me. I always learn what presents itself to me for consideration."

A young flying officer leaned toward the baron and whispered in his ear. Then the baron bowed to Professor Simpson. "My apologies for my suspicion. You are from Kansas, then?"

Clint Ragen walked forward half a dozen paces, until he could place his hand on the shoulder-high desk top. "He's all right. He was going to lead an expedition into the Gobi. What I want to know is this—what are you going to do with the bomber?"

Baron Suga permitted himself a smile. "First, I believe we are concerned with you. I find in you a former army officer who has committed an unfriendly act, and is perhaps, even now, contemplating espionage."

The pilot stood straighter, and his eyes hardened. "You can't get away with that. You'll either return that bomber to me for shipment, or I'll have your yellow hide. Understand?"

"Speak softly, Mr. Ragen," admonished the baron.

"Softly, hell! I'm delivering a bomber to the Chinese, and I'm going to deliver it. That ship is worth seventy thousand dollars."

The baron shrugged. "It carries a useful load of ten tons, has two five-fifty horsepower engines, and can fly nine hundred and fifty miles. What chance has our army if you hand such machines as this to the Chinese?"

Clint Ragen had the appearance of a man harried beyond resistance. His eyes had receded until they were two blue slits and his fingernails dug deeply into his palms.

"Listen," said the pilot, slowly, deliberately. "China is buying her ships from reliable companies, and she's paying cash. You have a plane here you call the Kawasaki KDK-5. It is a copy of

the Curtiss Hawk. You have another plane called the Nakajima 92, which is a copy of a French Morane."

"What of it?" shrugged the Baron.

"Just this," Clint roared. "You're too damned dumb to build your own planes. You've got to copy those of other nations, but China shoots square with us. She pays for our ships, instead of stealing our designs."

Baron Suga's face deepened in color. His mouth fell open, exhibiting sharp teeth. Unexpectedly, he lashed out and slapped Clint Ragen across the face. But the pilot did not wait to see what else would happen. His fist soared up before the baron's face could withdraw, and the baron slammed back, lips spouting blood.

A young flying officer pitched himself bodily at the American, hands outstretched, eyes glittering. But before he could connect, Clint Ragen's fist had hammered out again, and the pilot was down. A soldier raised his rifle, but before he could pull the trigger, some one knocked it aside.

Then a pistol butt caught the American on the side of the head, stunning him. Before he could recover, men were all over him, pinning him down.

"Take him," said Baron Suga, "to a prison. Allow him to communicate with no one. You have insulted officers of Japan, Mr. Ragen, and soon you will discover just what that means."

They dragged the pilot out of the room and left Professor Simpson wringing his hands. "Oh, dear!" he moaned. "You won't—you won't—"

"No," said Baron Suga. "If you promise us your silence, worthy sir, you will have your liberty."

"Thank you," said the professor, and tottered from the room, leaning heavily upon his umbrella.

CLINT RAGEN was up at dawn. Not that there was anything to do, but that he had been unable to sleep on the hard board and wooden pillow which constituted his bed. With a long sleepless night of pondering behind him, Clint Ragen had begun to appreciate the seriousness of his circumstances. He had heartily cursed himself for his verbal and fistic outbreak before the aviation officers, but that did him no good now.

The cell was not very big, but Clint paced what there was of it. The chances were against his getting to see the ambassador or even a consul. Clint was under no delusions as to the actual reasons behind the seizure of the plane. That sweet bomber would look quite well with the blood-red disk of Japan on its wings.

In the eyes of international law, Clint Ragen was a gun runner, and appalling things happened to gentlemen who pursued that hectic trade. There were guns in those crates—late-model machine guns which were to serve as armament for the ship. And Japan's declaration concerning arms had been made while Clint was aboard that old-fashioned tub.

So now, in short, Clint Ragen was as good—or as bad—as a criminal in the eyes of Japan and, subsequently, in the eyes of the United States.

But Clint's ponderings were interrupted by a light tap, a grate of iron on stone, and the whisper of cloth. Some one was coming down the corridor which led to the cell.

Clint tensed, waiting, wondering what message might be forthcoming. Then he swore and sat back dejectedly on his wooden bunk. Professor Simpson was staring through the small window in the door.

"Well?" Clint asked.

Simpson removed his glasses, wiped them, put them back, and took a deep breath. "Good morning, Mr. Ragen. You do not appear to have spent a comfortable night."

Clint grunted. "Slept like a daisy."

"I believe I have news for you," continued Simpson. "The officers have charitably offered you a compromise."

"What's this?"

Simpson coughed hollowly. "They are thinking of giving you a military court martial."

"Firing squad?"

"Well," the professor hesitated, "not exactly. Perhaps that might be, too. But instead of that, they are quite willing that you should go free."

"What's the joker?" snapped Clint, moving near.

"You see, yesterday afternoon, they tried to put the bomber together, and, as I understand it, they encountered some difficulty. The matter is a complicated one, I presume."

"Complicated!" Clint snorted. "All they have to do is pull it out of the crates, buckle on the wings, mount the motors and fasten the props. I'm afraid you got 'em wrong, professor."

"No, I don't believe I did. It seems there is some difficulty. I don't exactly understand it, but the motors won't fit the mounts."

"Huh! They probably don't know when they're right side up." Clint moved restlessly. "Well, what's that got to do with me?"

"They asked me to tell you—" began Simpson. "They want you to put the—er—to put the plane together for them."

Clint let out an explosive sound. His eyes flamed. "You mean they've got the crust to—now let me get this straight, Simpson. They want me to fix up the ship they swiped off me. That right?"

"Yes," agreed the professor, obviously relieved.

"Well, you can tell them for me that they can go straight to hell. I suppose they want me to buy gasoline for it, too."

The professor began to wring his hands. "But, my dear fellow, can't you see, don't you understand that they will drop all charges if you will do this for them? I do not believe that you fully appreciate what you face."

Clint grated his teeth and started to swear, but suddenly he checked himself, eyes narrow, speculative.

"All right," he said, suddenly. "Go back and tell them that I'll be right with them as soon as they let me out."

"Ah!" said Simpson. "I thought you would listen."

THE aviation field was nearly the best Japan had to offer along such lines. Here the Inland Sea and the jagged islands made flying a very difficult task, for emergency fields did not exist. In the United States, such a field as that on which Clint Ragen now found himself would have been a poor substitute. The equipment was modern enough, and the hangars were large, but the runways were short and uneven. Bordered on each side by rice paddies, the ground was soggy.

A file of soldiers waited to take the foreign pilot into custody. They marched him out to the detached pile of segments which, when assembled,

would be the bomber. Clint stopped short and snorted loudly.

Professor Simpson, bringing up the rear, also stopped.

"Tell them," Clint said to the professor, "that they might at least mount the wheels on the fuselage before they try to fasten on the wings."

Simpson caught the attention of a young flying officer and passed the message along. Orders were rapped, and the half-braced wings came off and the wheels started to go on. Clint stood by sullenly, watching the greasy yellow mechanics swarm over seventy thousand dollars' worth of plane. Then his professional pride got the better of him, and he pulled off his coat and waded in.

With the landing gear attended to, Clint stepped back and told the professor the proper directions for mounting the wing. Simpson translated in a monotonous voice, leaning heavily on his umbrella, his gray hair rustling beneath his black hat.

"If my chiefs could see me now," said Clint, "a firing squad would be tame. I'm mad enough to tear into this whole outfit."

"I would strongly advise against it," the professor said. "There are several armed men in the immediate vicinity."

Clint stepped forward to help take a mighty engine out of its cradle. With his hands full of spare parts, he tried to point to the motor's destination, but the mechanics stared blankly at him. Clint looked around for the professor, but that worthy, for the moment, had disappeared. The pilot shrugged, and did the best he could with sign language.

With engines one and two mounted, Clint stepped back, to discover that the professor was again with him. He took the opportunity to outline the procedure for mounting a prop, and then, the minute Clint's back was turned, Simpson was once more gone.

When the propeller was hubbed, the professor was back.

"Damn!" said Clint, "I wish you wouldn't do a Houdini every time I need you. What's the matter?"

Simpson merely fumbled nervously with the binocular case and said nothing.

The afternoon wore away, but each passing moment saw the bomber closer

to completion. The motors were in place; the wings were on; control wires had been slipped over their pulleys, and Clint was adding a few finishing touches.

Six machine guns, lately covered with cosmoline, were now laid out on a strip of canvas, shining under the slanted rays of the departing sun. Clint carried a brace up to a cockpit and fastened them down upon their mount. A Japanese flying officer was all attention.

"He wants," said Simpson, "to know how to load them."

Clint obliged. One of his boxes divulged a dozen loaded drums. Carefully, he inserted the belts and pulled them through the breeches.

"Tell him—" Clint began, but looked up in time to see that the professor had once more disappeared. He scratched his head irritably and began to demonstrate at length in pantomime.

With the guns all mounted, Clint climbed down, and found Simpson again at his elbow.

"That fellow," said the professor, pointing to another flying officer, "is anxious to find out where you fill the gasoline tanks."

Clint nodded wearily as he saw a large fuel truck rumble up to the side of the ship. Hoses were tossed to the pilot, and one by one he filled the tanks, amid the exclamations of the onlookers. They had never before seen auxiliary tanks in a ship's wing. Once started, Clint filled them all.

An officer wanted to know exactly how the controls worked, and exactly what all the meters stood for. With a sigh, Clint sat in the pilot's seat and demonstrated. The pilot looked around for his interpreter, but once more he found Simpson to be among the missing.

However, he was not needed, for here was one flying officer who spoke an understandable brand of English.

"You've been very kind," said the Japanese pilot. "Now would you please start the engines? I would like to know how that is done."

Clint started them, one by one, and sent their blast rocketing about the hills of the Inland Sea. He pointed to the gauges which showed when the engines were warm. Then, letting them idle, he leaned back, tired from the day's work.

The officer smiled thinly. "You have been very kind. Now, perhaps, we had better restore you to the prison."

"The prison!" snapped Clint. "I thought—"

"Yes, but you were not right. We still have grave charges to press against you."

CLINT sat up straight, and something in his eyes made the officer hastily draw a pistol from his belt. Then there came a shriek from the hangars, and the sound of pounding feet. The officer turned, and over his shoulder Clint saw Professor Simpson racing toward the bomber, umbrella-less, hatless, and very hard of face.

To think was to act. Clint snatched the pistol from the officer's hand and slammed him in the jaw. He dumped the Japanese out onto the ground, reaching down with the same movement to help Simpson into the pit. But Simpson needed no help. He scrambled in like a scared rabbit, leaped over the cockpit combing and slithered down into the observer's pit behind.

Clint fired twice at men who were trying to catch hold of the wings. Two throttles went all the way down on their arcs, and the plane began to rumble forward, shaking in every section.

"What the hell—" Clint started to shout, but a machine gun near the hangar opened up, and the bomber took the air.

Another machine gun started to bark, but this time it was just in back of the pilot's head. He turned for an instant, to see Simpson fumbling with the loaded guns. Clint didn't know what possible trouble Simpson could have gotten into, but the bomber's wheels were off, and the trouble didn't matter. Back on the tarmac, fighting planes were being rammed out and started. Without a good gunner to cover his tail, Clint knew he was in for a hot time of it.

As quickly as possible, he built altitude and began to fly southwest. He watched the skies about him for the first signs of the attack he knew would come. Those Japanese pursuit planes could make close to two hundred miles an hour, and the bomber was going top speed at a hundred and eighty.

The two machine guns mounted in front of him were empty, but, reaching

back for drums, Clint quickly remedied that. He was hard put to keep his eyes open against the beating slipstream, and his hair persisted in whipping down over his face. And then a helmet plopped down beside him, and without asking questions, he put it on.

Dusk was upon the world below him. The blue waters of the Inland Sea were stretching out, cut here and there by terraced islands. But Clint was not looking at the beauty of it. He was worried about the bomber, for he knew that it hadn't been test-flown, and that in the event of a crash, he would have to ride it down.

And then the first Japanese Kawasaki 92 plummeted out of the sky and sizzled past the bomber. The pursuit pilot banked sharply and, above the engines' roar, Clint could hear the stutter of guns. Another plane shot down and came up again, tracer streaking through its prop.

The guns in the observer's pit began to chatter. Clint pressed his own trips and tried to angle the heavy bomber into firing position, but he could not stunt such a ship. He could only plow ahead and trust to luck.

The interplane struts of the leading Kawasaki suddenly disappeared. Before Clint could grasp that miracle, the plane was spinning. It would get down all right, but in a very tattered condition.

Another Kawasaki lanced by, but it was not firing. Clint could see the pilot jerking vainly at the loose stick. That fellow would also have a tough time bringing his ship back. A third pursuit ship zoomed past Clint's nose, and he pressed his trips. The prop went out in a shower of splinters, and the maimed motor began to shake loose from its mount. Clint grinned. He'd show those guys!

Three ships in formation lanced out of nowhere, guns hammering, motors howling, wires screaming. They came like javelins, but before they reached the altitude of the bomber, the lead plane slipped harshly. Then the second skidded, and the third went into a spin. Clint's eyes bulged.

An ambitious pilot dived down and leveled off, streaking directly for the great plane's nose. Clint fired three

short bursts straight into the other's prop. And then the air was full of smoke. Far below, a parachute opened. The flaming ruin of the pursuit Kawasaki sent a black geyser of water into the hovering night.

CLINT realized that darkness was settling rapidly. He could hear other motors, but he could not spot them, and he knew, in turn, that he could not be spotted. He sat back, relaxing, and began to worry about his destination.

Without a navigator, even though the flight to Shanghai was only eight hundred miles, Clint did not know where he would end up. Besides, he was entirely too worn out for five and a half hours of flying. Allowing for that and his lack of charts, he did not believe he could possibly reach Shanghai. It was a bad end to a glorious career. He'd go down in the Yellow Sea, and there wouldn't even be wreckage to mark his passage.

He groaned to himself, and wondered what in the name of all the Japanese devils had caused him to escape. There'd be a price on his head, now. Some of those Kawasakis had been crashed, that was certain, and even if the pilots hadn't been killed, the offense was great. However, that wouldn't make too much difference with the Chinese. They might give him a raise in pay for it, in fact. But then, of course, he'd never get to China.

A slithering sensation against his right arm made him look up. He saw that Professor Simpson had slid down into the front cockpit, and was settling himself into the co-pilot's seat.

Clint Ragen saw the small man begin to wipe his face with a handkerchief. He thrust the glasses into his pocket and ran his fingers into his hair. And then he pulled a small map and an octant out of his frock coat and snapped on the panel light. That done, he stood up and held the navigation instrument to his eye, writing on a pad.

There was a sliding panel which closed in the cockpit, and Simpson drew

this over, shutting out most of the engine's noise.

"Fly two-hundred and twenty-one degrees," said Simpson in a crisp, clear voice. "That'll slam Shanghai right on the old nose. Allowing for drift, it'll take five hours and forty-five minutes. If you're tired, old boy, I'll push her along."

Clint Ragen frowned. He was puzzled by the professor's use of slang, and more puzzled by the change in his tone of voice. He turned and looked squarely, and what he saw made his eyes widen perceptibly.

Professor Simpson's gray hair was now black. There were no lines on his face, and without them, the expression was youthful and eager. Simpson looked very military and businesslike.

"Just who the hell are you?" Clint asked, amazed.

"Lieutenant Brandon, United States Navy."

"But why the—oh, I get it." Clint grinned. "You sure had me going for a while. I thought you were just what you said you were. You Intelligence boys sure do run into some awful scrapes. I was with the Army Intelligence over the Mexican border for a while."

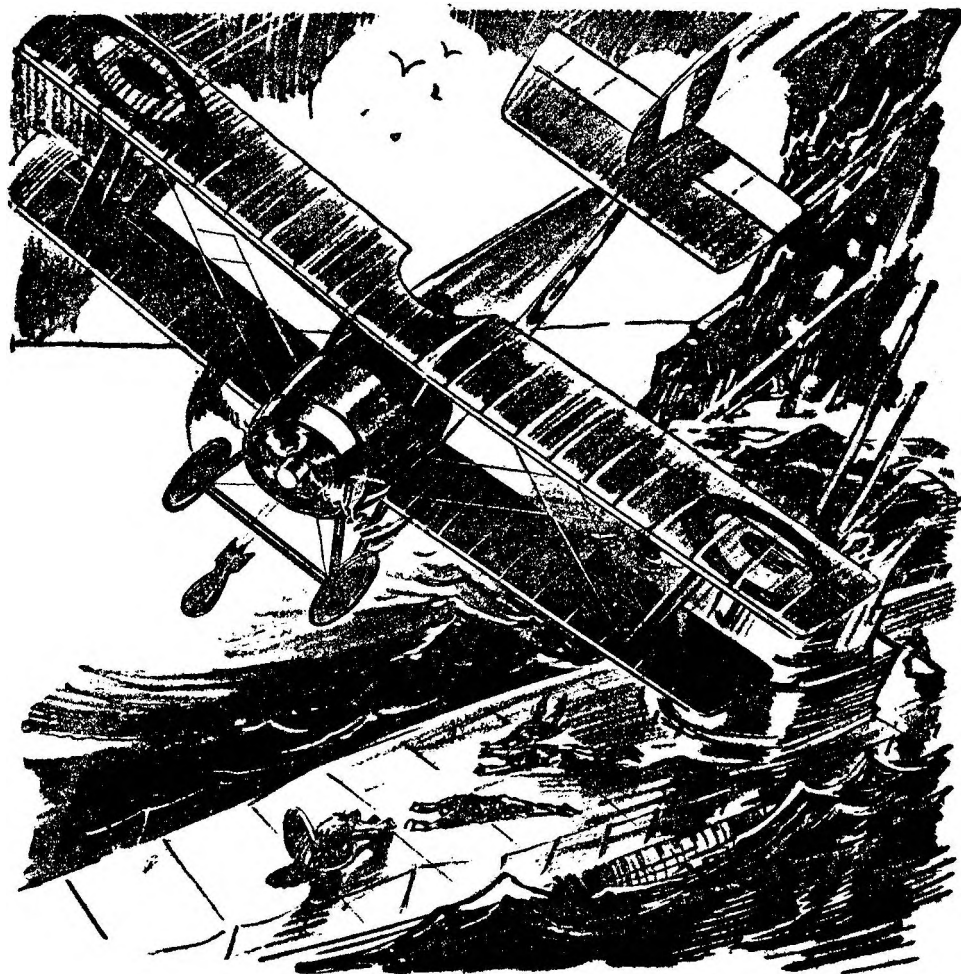
"But," said Brandon, alias Simpson, "I'm afraid I led you an awful chase, with some bad risks. To get you out to the field to assemble the ship, I told them they'd break it if they didn't know how. You see, I had orders to get photographs of a Japanese airdrome and the landmarks around it, and I didn't even think I'd better give it a try until they had your ship thrown over the side. That sure simplified things. I got some beauties of pictures." He patted the binocular case.

Clint Ragen looked at him and grinned. "Well, thanks, anyway. I'd never have lived it down if they'd gotten this bomber. But I still don't see how they knew it was aboard the old tub."

"No?" grinned the Navy man. "One of our chaps tipped 'em off to give me a chance to get out to the field!"



Skimming low over the steel-plated deck of the German U-boat, Brock dropped one bomb.



Shells of Treachery

By J. D. ROGERS, JR.

In the inky blackness that was the city of London, eerie sirens split the night with their warning wails of approaching Zeppelins. Then came a sudden ominous silence that meant no ordinary raid—a silence followed by weird shrill whistle—and an explosion. But no German bomb had dropped on the streets of London that night. Something far more terrifying, far more deadly, had struck.

A SMILE of anticipated pleasure was on Chad Brock's weather-tanned face as he crossed Lancaster Square and halted momentarily

to survey the entrance to one of London's famous war-time rendezvous.

"Good ol' Copper Kettle," he said in salutation to the huge model suspend-

ed above the alcove entrance. "It's worth flying the Channel any day to feast eyes on you."

The flying Intelligence officer stepped into the entrance way and reached for the large brass knocker. The first crash of that often used instrument upon the thick oak panel seemed to put unseen forces into play, for almost simultaneously with that crash, London was smothered in inky blackness. Fast upon the heels of that darkness came a crescendo of sound, sound that rose in pitch until it reached a shrilling note. London's sirens were splitting the night with their warning, eerie wails.

"Night raid!" bellowed a near-by policeman. "Take cover!"

Chad Brock halted, then turned back, drawn by the prospective show about to be staged in the star-lit heavens. Keeping within the shelter of the alcove's protecting arch, he took up a position at the sidewalk's edge. There was a glitter of excitement in the eyes he turned skyward, where, even as he looked, long shafts of light began to shift grotesquely in their vain search for the night raiders.

About the watcher, turmoil reigned supreme. Excited shouts and sounds of scurrying feet vied with the sirens in noise. On every side, doorways spouted inmates. Even the Copper Kettle released a flood of humanity that all but swept the sky gazer along with it in its mad rush for underground tunnels.

More nerve-trying markers of time crept by. The searchlights continued to wage their vigil, but the sirens grew silent one by one. As the last of those instruments ground out a final mechanical groan, a deathly quiet settled over the ancient town.

There was something ominous about that sudden silence. Chad Brock felt it. The half-dozen soldiers now gathered about him in the alcove entrance seemed to feel it, too. They shifted nervously, breathed tensely. The apparent irregularity of the raid was pressing upon them. No motors roaring in the heavens, no bursts of anti-aircraft fire. And, still more noticeable, there were no reverberating detonations of exploding bombs.

"Damn funny!" burst out an English officer among the small knot of men.

"The blighters must have been driven off before reaching the city."

Suddenly a faint and distant sound caused the men to crowd frantically back into the alcove. It began as a low, shrill whistle, increasing enormously in volume with each split second. Then it was upon them. Their eyes were tortured by a blinding flash, their eardrums deadened by the detonation of an explosion. What had been half a dozen stone buildings across the square now rained back from the sky in a mass of crushed and powdered masonry.

"Mother of God!" swore a furloughing Irishman, crossing himself. "That was no Heinnie bomb! That was a—" The remainder of the sentence gurgled in the speaker's throat, for Chad Brock's hand had shot out and clamped fiercely across the man's mouth.

"Silence, fool!" grated the Intelligence officer.

Sputtering, the Irishman swung upon his assailant, only to halt as an understanding light dawned upon his brain.

"Sorry, sir," he stammered in confusion. "I didn't realize."

"Forget it!" cut in Chad Brock, a warning light in his eyes. "Forget it all!"

Then, unmindful of the curious glances of those who had witnessed the strange scene, the Intelligence officer swung out of the entrance way and darted up the street. A minute later he overhauled a taxi feeling its way through the darkness, leaped upon the running board and into the seat by the driver.

"Official business!" he spat out commandingly. "Switch on your lights and rush me to Flagger Court. The raid's over."

Chad Brock had just been spectator to a scene whose truth fore-shadowed a possible catastrophe to the Allied cause. Forgotten for the moment was his mission to London. Gone was the usual smile from his face. Instead, worried lines curved across his forehead and fear assuming the proportions of dread burned in excited eyes.

Vividly he recalled the absence of aircraft in the sky. Forcefully he was reminded of the lack of exploding bombs. And far more impressing still, was the exclamation echoing in his

brain—the exclamation of a soldier who knew the songs of approaching shells.

CHAD was brought out of it abruptly by a scraping of brakes. A moment later his footsteps beat a fast tattoo on the staircase of England's War Department Building.

"Official business!" he panted to two soldiers who stood guard before a door. "I must see General Pittingham immediately!"

A minute later Chad found himself in an anteroom, trying to convince a stubborn orderly that he must see the general without further delay. Entreaties and prayers failing, he brushed the non-com aside, crossed the room in three fast strides, and opened the door leading into the general's private office.

At sound of the intrusion, half a dozen uniformed figures straightened up from the table over which they had been bending. As they turned inquisitive gazes upon him, Chad was quick to note that their faces were mirrors of mental alarm, that their shoulders were sagging under the weight of a great emergency. It was apparent that they, too, knew the truth.

"Well!" demanded a tall officer whom Chad recognized as General Pittingham.

"Sorry, sir," apologized the American. "I came with news, but find that you are already informed."

"What do you mean?" grated the general irritably.

"That the Germans have just dropped a large-calibre shell in the middle of London!" shot Chad Brock.

"Who are you, and how did you happen to know this?" the general asked pointedly.

"I am Captain Chad Brock of Allied Intelligence, operating out of Paris," responded the American, reaching into his inside pocket and securing an envelope containing his credentials, which he handed to the general. "Tonight I was on Lancaster Square when the alarm sounded. I remained on the street to watch the show, and it so happened that the shell struck across the Square from where I was standing."

"And you recognized it as such?" blurted another officer impulsively.

Chad nodded an assent. "I've been under heavy artillery fire on numerous occasions," he replied. "Incidentally, I was in Paris during two of the bombardments by the long-range gun. I know the sound of approaching shells."

"Did anyone else recognize the sound?" pressed the same officer.

"An Irish infantryman on leave from the Front," responded Chad. "I silenced him."

At the words, General Pittingham sank dejectedly into a chair, the envelope still unopened in his hand. "It's unbelievable!" he muttered. "Apparently the enemy is striking at the morale of our people. Checked on the Front, they are endeavoring to crush home morale. We must prevent such a catastrophe. At whatever costs the news must be kept from the populace."

"Then the alarm was a sham!" exclaimed Chad. "You knew the shell was coming?"

General Pittingham nodded. "Prussian irony!" he grated aloud. "In our own code they inform us that a shell is about to be launched."

"Preposterous!" exclaimed an elderly officer who looked as if he might have been with Wellington at Waterloo. "I contend that such a thing is impossible. We have proved by the map that a gun would have to hurl a projectile one hundred miles at the least to reach London."

"Still, they have a gun capable of dropping shells in Paris from a distance of seventy-five miles," spoke up a young officer.

"Preposterous!" grunted the elderly officer derisively.

"But how else *could* it be done?" retorted the other. "If it had been a Zeppelin, our detectors would have picked up the motors before they reached London. And as for ships, we know the general location of every German vessel armed to hurl large-calibre shells."

"Enough!" interrupted General Pittingham. "Whether it is a shell or a bomb, the fact remains that the enemy is aiming at home morale. If the people learn that German brains have constructed a gun capable of dropping shells in London, panic will result. The whole affair, don't you see, is the plot

of some Prussian schemer." The general hesitated a moment in concentrated thought. "And," he continued aloud. "There is only one Prussian capable of such underhanded methods."

"Von Schletcher!" chorused half a dozen voices in unison.

CHAD BROCK tensed at mention of the Prussian agent known across the continent for his diabolic plots and his uncanny ability to disrupt organizations and tear down citizens' morale. He stepped forward and addressed the general.

"That's why I'm in London, sir. I've been hot on his trail for over a year now."

General Pittingham looked at the speaker, and, as if suddenly remembering the envelope in his hand, tore it open and scanned its contents.

"American, eh?" he commented aloud "And formerly a detective on the New York police force!"

"Right, sir," answered Chad. "And I came over with the Canadians. Spent a year and a half on the Front as a flyer and was then transferred to Intelligence. When von Schletcher began his operations in Russia, I was despatched there to get him. He gave me the slip there and later in Servia, but I'll get him yet, sir."

"And you have cause to believe him in London?" pressed General Pittingham.

"If not in London, somewhere in England," responded the American.

"Then the whole scheme begins to clear," stated the general. "While that gun drops shells in London, von Schletcher and his agents will be working up on the weakened morale of our people."

"But, general," interrupted an officer, looking up from the map he had been studying, "with such a gun, how would the Germans be able to score direct hits on a city over a hundred miles away?"

"Right!" put in another. "To aim such a gun, atmospheric conditions and speed of air currents would have to be known. Even the rotation of the earth would have to be allowed for."

"I have it!" burst out another excitedly. "Those strange code messages our operators have been reporting all day are reports on atmospheric condi-

tions, flashed by short wave to submarines and relayed to Germany."

General Pittingham's fist banged upon the table. "Now we're getting somewhere!" he exulted. "Major York!"

"Yes, sir."

"Get in touch with British Headquarters in France. Advise them to try and locate that gun. Major Leake, have a message flashed to all patrol boats in the North Sea advising that they apply extra vigil for submarines. Major Reaves, head officers on an inspection tour of all radio stations in England. Have the personnel of each station checked closely."

The general turned to voice another order, but his lips were silenced by a sound that drummed down through the roof and floors above. Airplane motors deep, lusty, ominous.

For the duration of a minute the inmates of the room were rigidly tense. Then, as blending roars began to fade into the north, General Pittingham broke the silence.

"I gave orders that no patrols were to fly over the city tonight," he said.

"Right, sir," responded an aide. "I phoned the commandant of every field."

"Then, by God," swore the general furiously, "find out which field those planes are from."

The officer turned to carry out the command, but was saved the trouble. Before he had taken two steps, the door flew open and in rushed an officer, waving a fistful of paper hand bills.

"Planes!" he gasped breathlessly. "Three of them, dropping these!"

Chad Brock had one in his hand instantly. He read down the cheaply printed page furiously.

PEOPLE OF ENGLAND

Tonight a German gun dropped a shell in the middle of London. Your leaders faked an air raid. Tomorrow night that gun will speak again. So the next night and the next. But that is not all. Even as your leaders are deceiving you with false alarms, so they are deceiving you with false information from the Front. Your armies are being driven back. Your food supply is being cut off. Complete annihilation faces your race if it continues to wage an unjust war with the Fatherland.

That was all, but Chad Brock saw a signature to that lie as plainly as if

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it were really affixed there. It read: Karl von Schletcher.

"Orderly!" he exclaimed almost fiercely. "Get in touch with Prince Edward Field. I want my plane on the line, warm."

Soon after, Chad had reached Prince Edward Field.

"No time for formalities!" he blurted to the men tending his ship. "Which direction did those ships go?"

"Straight north," replied a young officer. "But I must see—"

Chad clambered into the cockpit. With the officer still insisting on credentials, he gunned the motor and jumped the chocks. The plane swerved, threatened to ground-loop, then straightened under skilful manipulation of controls and roared down the field. Faster and faster grew its speed. Then suddenly the rough bumping softened into a gentle roll. Chad Brock, American, and a former New York City policeman, was off on his greatest man hunt.

A SWIFT scrutiny of the landmarks below gave him his bearings. With a kick of the rudder he altered his direction and sent the plane roaring straight into the north upon the invisible sky trail. For long minutes he flew in that manner, his eyes searching vainly for exhaust flashes. Nevertheless, Chad Brock was content in the knowledge that those fugitive ships would have to land sometime. They would not attempt to do so without the aid of ground lights. The rest was simple. With eyes controlling a twenty-mile vista, he would be likely to see them.

And the American was correct in his surmise. When he was certain that he must be nearing the shores of the North Sea, Chad saw a sight. Approximately ten miles ahead, flares suddenly illuminated a small field—and into that eerie illumination three tiny dragonflies dropped to quick landings. Then, almost as quickly as they had flared up, the lights went out, and darkness again held sway over the scene.

Chad pointed the nose of his plane at the spot and began to search the surrounding terrain for lights which might serve as markers. Almost directly to the right of that alien field he saw two, which he instantly recognized to be beacons atop radio poles. It took but a

moment to form a mental picture of the general layout, and with that picture etched in his memory, Chad cut the throttle and nosed groundward in a tight spiral.

As the dark blur of earth came closer and closer, the flyer leveled out and risked a flare. Leaning over the rim of his cockpit, he saw revealed in the ghostly light an old English manor house. But the sight that forced an exclamation of success through his lips and caused his hand to thrust the stick hard forward, was the long meadow adjoining.

A dizzy drop of a thousand feet, a long sweeping glide, and the plane's wheels made gentle contact with the earth. Over went the throttle again, and Chad taxied the plane right up to the doors of a large outer building. A minute later he was explaining briefly to a sleepy-eyed servant.

"Official business," he ground out sharply. "I must get to the radio station at once."

Five minutes later a large touring car struggled out of the garage. Chad climbed in. "Drop me one mile this side of the radio station," he ordered. "Then return here and see that my petrol tanks are filled."

"Yes, sir," responded the chauffeur. "I'll have you there in a jiffy, sir."

A jiffy turned out to be exactly fifteen minutes by Chad's watch. It had been a quarter of three when they pulled into the highway. It was an even three when the car ground to a jerky halt and the driver announced that their destination had been reached.

Chad climbed to the ground, waited until the man had turned the car and started back, then set out on foot. His course led across the fields at an angle to the highway.

But after an hour of vain search, the smile had gone from Chad's face. After another half hour in which he fared no better, he was ready to admit that success was impossible in the darkness. It was one thing to look down upon markers from above. It was an entirely different task to locate those markers on the ground.

He turned back to the highway. Impulse slanted his footsteps in the direction of the radio station. It seemed

highly probable that the operators might have heard the planes.

The American stopped dead in his tracks. "My God!" he grated softly. "Why haven't I thought of that before?"

FAINT suggestions of an approaching dawn were just touching the eastern sky when Chad came upon the radio station nestling in a large clearing off to the right of the highway. Light streamed through the windows of the operations room. Keeping in the shadows, he warily approached the building.

Chad reached the corner of the building and began to creep slowly towards one of the lighted windows. Sounds of voices within came faintly to his ears as he reached the window and crouched tensely below the sill. Then, slowly and carefully, he raised his eyes to the window level.

Had Chad Brock gazed into a room full of ghosts, the physical effect could not have been more pronounced. He seemed to freeze—rigid. And small wonder, for standing in the middle of the room, attired in the uniform of an English major, was the man he had followed over half of Europe—Karl von Schletcher.

Chad whirled at a sudden sound behind, but was too late. Even as he saw his assailant, something heavy crashed upon his head. There was a great flash, then blinding darkness. He grew limp, then, with a resigning sigh, crumpled into a heap.

When he regained consciousness, Chad's first sensation was that of a throbbing head. Next he became aware that he was lying face down in a bunk, his hands and feet securely bound. Then with a rush his memory returned.

For a minute he lay still, listening. Men were talking in the room adjoining. As he stirred slightly, a voice whispered out of the semi-darkness a few feet away.

"Thank God you came to! I thought they had killed you."

"Who are you?" asked Chad softly.

"I was operator in charge," came a grating response. "Who are you?"

The American Intelligence agent was too wary to answer that question. He

smoothed it off by asking, "How long have I been here?"

"Hours," responded the other.

"What happened to the other operator?" asked the American.

"Turned out to be a German agent," said the Englishman bitterly.

"What station is this?" pressed Chad.

"Station A-31," replied the dethroned operator. "We receive atmospheric conditions every hour from Government observatories and relay them to naval vessels in the North Sea."

Chad felt a quiver run up his spine at that announcement. So this was the key station—the station that acted as eyes for that giant gun across the sea. And he, who'd been a metropolitan detective, after stumbling upon such a find, had blundered into capture. A wave of anger at himself caused him to struggle fiercely with his bonds.

"Quiet!" whispered the other prisoner quickly. "Some one is coming!"

The warning had hardly reached Chad's ears when the door opened and light from the operations room flooded into the improvised prison. Von Schletcher, still attired in his English major's uniform, appeared silhouetted in the doorway.

"So you finally came to," he sneered at the American. "I was beginning to think you were going to stay out."

Chad's silence seemed to irritate the Prussian. He came over to the bunk and glared balefully down at his captive. "How did you know I was here?" he asked abruptly.

"A little bird told me," mocked Chad.

"A little bird, eh!" sneered von Schletcher. "Well, well, strange that little bird didn't inform you that I was expecting you. However, it is well he didn't. You pestered me no little bit in Russia. You made work hard in Italy and Servia. I have decided that you shall not plague me here in England."

"Thank you," retorted Chad boldly. "You do me honor."

Von Schletcher glared down at him for a moment. "You Americans are a stupid lot," he grated sarcastically. "You are so stupid that you hinder by your very blundering. I can but wonder what we will do with your race when we have won the war."

"You're looking a long way into the future, aren't you?" asked Chad dryly.

A mirthless laugh escaped von Schletcher's lips. "The knock on your head has unbalanced you, Captain Brock. You seem already to have forgotten the incidents of last night. Perhaps you can explain how any nation can stand against guns that drop shells unerringly from a hundred miles away."

The words pierced the American deeper than he would ever let von Schletcher know. He retorted with a confidence he did not feel, "Your gun will be silenced!"

"Not before it has crushed the morale of the English," scored von Schletcher. "Then, with our fleet set loose upon the sea—" He stopped speaking at that point and turned to receive a message from the German operator who had entered at that moment.

"They are coming, Excellency!" said the agent excitedly.

"Then there is but one course to follow," responded von Schletcher. He drew his automatic and, taking in the two captives with one sweep, ordered, "Untie them!"

The German operator stepped into the room and quickly performed the task.

"Into the operations room!" grated von Schletcher. "Both of you!"

Chad Brock and the captive operator filed into the room and sat down in the chairs pointed out to them.

"There is no time to waste words," began von Schletcher in a voice that carried an obvious threat. "English officers are on the way here to check personnel. You—" he nodded towards the former operator—"will receive them as you have always done. You, Captain Brock—" there was a faint flavor of sarcasm in the words—"will just act natural. Perhaps you will convince them that you are waiting here in hopes of catching and deciphering some of the code messages which filled the air yesterday. Of course," he finished with a suggestive shrug, "there is no need to warn you against trying anything."

He turned to the German operator. "Watch them closely. At the first suggestion of a signal, shoot to kill. I'll take care of the rest."

WITH his stage set, the Prussian schemer suddenly assumed the pose of a listener. The sound of a car turning in from the highway caused him to back slowly into the adjoining room and close the door to a small crack. Through that tiny opening, Chad knew, two hawklike eyes were devouring his every move, and the muzzle of an ugly-looking automatic was bearing upon his body.

Outside, the car purred to a halt. There was the sound of a door slamming shut. A moment later, two officers marched into the room. One of them Chad recognized instantly. He was Major Reaves, the officer General Pittingham had detailed to have all radio-station personnel checked.

A look of surprise swept over the major's face. "Captain Brock!" he exclaimed. "Fancy finding you here."

"Quite a coincidence," responded the American naturally. "I lost those planes in the darkness close by here. I landed and decided to remain in hopes of picking something out of the air."

Major Reaves turned to the officer accompanying him. "I say, Harrison, will you check up while I chat with Captain Brock?"

As that officer turned to comply with the request, Major Reaves turned back to the American. "And have you had any luck, captain?" he asked.

"None to speak of," returned Chad, smiling inwardly at the truth of the statement. He shoved a chair forward for the major and took one himself.

Major Reaves frowned and shook his head slowly. "A pretty mess," he commented with a note of despair in his voice. "The whole affair has taken a nasty turn. There was a small demonstration in front of the Palace this morning. If that infernal gun drops a shell in London tonight—" he gesticulated with a shrug—"well, I'd hate to bear the responsibility."

Chad knew that von Schletcher had heard those words, and he could visualize the fiendish smile of triumph such a statement would smear across that Prussian's face. Then, because he was about to match wits with that master schemer, he smiled, too.

Slapping his empty pockets, he uttered a shallow oath and asked, "May I have a cigarette, major?"

"Righto," responded the officer, digging into his pocket and producing a pack.

Chad picked one, accepted a light, then settled back in his chair. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed that the German operator was watching him suspiciously. For a minute the American hesitated. Though outwardly calm, he was a riot of emotions inside. His blood chilled as he remembered all that was staked upon the simple gesture he was about to make. The chilled blood in turn sent cold ripples up his spine as he realized how much of chance was needed for the success of that gesture.

Then, with a prayer in his heart, he began his act. As nonchalantly as if he were engaging in an after-dinner smoke, he raised the cigarette to his lips, his thumb and forefinger holding the small cylinder. As a result of that technique, his hand formed a cup that concealed the glowing end from the watching eyes of the German.

For six seconds, Chad held the cigarette to his lips, and during that tense space of time, the burning end glowed in a series of irregular flashes. Then his head went back and a long stream of smoke trailed ceilingward.

"You Americans swear and cuss, but you really like our English cigarettes, eh, what?" suggested Major Reaves with a little laugh. Though there was nothing obvious in the officer's manner, Chad felt that he had seen—that he was waiting for more.

"When we can't get American ones, we can make your English ones do," he responded, hoping by the mercy of chance that the major would catch the hidden meaning of those words. Then, with that officer looking directly at him, he again raised the cigarette to his lips.

Again the improvised radio began to function. "S.O.S." pleaded the spaced intervals between flashes. It was the call all men knew, and had it been flashed from a ship sinking at sea, it could not have been hurled with more sheer desperation.

For the minute following, hope and fear waged a nerve-wracking tug of war in the brain of Chad Brock. Then, with despair threatening to be victor, new forces were ushered into the fray—forces that routed despair and sub-

dued fear. The eyelids of Major Reaves had moved perceptibly.

An interruption eased the tension that the moment threatened to bring on. Harrison came over and announced in abrupt, military fashion, "Everything seems proper, sir."

"Good," responded Major Reaves, rising to his feet. "We have just time to reach London before nightfall. Will you be coming along soon, captain?"

"Can't say," replied Chad evenly. "Think I'll hang around until something turns up."

"Then cheerio," returned the major, walking towards the door.

"Cheerio," returned Chad. Then, as the sound of their motor began to rapidly diminish in the distance, he experienced the sensation of eyes glaring at him. Turning, he looked into the face of Germany's premier agent. The Prussian's eyes were aglow, his lips curled in a triumphant sneer.

"You heard what the English pig said," gloated von Schletcher. "A demonstration in front of the Palace—a demonstration because of one shell. What will they do tomorrow?"

"Perhaps there will be no tomorrow!" grated Chad with a harshness that made von Schletcher regard him suspiciously.

"They're calling!" interrupted the German operator.

"Get their position," shot von Schletcher. "Give them the latest reports."

With that, he turned back to the captives and appraised them with a scowl. Then, as if reaching a sudden decision, he gave a call. Almost instantly two men attired in flying coveralls appeared in the doorway.

"See that they are fed and securely bound," ordered the Prussian. "Then prepare a plane for me."

THAT last sentence worried Chad as he shuffled back into his prison. It meant von Schletcher's escape unless Major Reaves was prompt in bringing assistance. But suppose Major Reaves did not return at all. Suppose that flutter of eyelashes had been imaginary. Suppose von Schletcher were allowed to go on unhindered in his plotting. What then?

Sudden weariness overcame the American, and without a semblance of resistance, he submitted to being

bound. Then he was tossed roughly into a bunk.

"I say," whispered his fellow sufferer excitedly, the moment the door closed behind the Germans. "What's this of a gun dropping shells in London? Surely such a thing isn't possible!"

"Not only possible, but true," responded Chad, bitter helplessness slowly arousing his anger.

The Englishman did not reply. "Let's get out of here," Chad said softly. "If we can gain control of this station and can locate that code book, we may be able to deflect the aim of that gun."

"Count me in on that," whispered the Englishman eagerly.

But the task seemed futile. As the two men struggled vainly with bonds that cut wickedly into their wrists, the semi-darkness of their prison cell gradually gave way to inky blackness. Night had fallen. Night, with Britain's capital shuddering under the shadow of a mechanical menace that hovered above it with terrifying aspect.

"It's useless," admitted the operator. "My bonds haven't given an inch."

"We can't give up," grated Chad determinedly. "God, what was that?"

A pistol shot had exploded in the operating room. It was followed by cries and sounds of thumping feet. Then the door flew open and light flooded into the prison room. Major Reaves, gun in hand, dashed in.

"By Jove, are you all right?" he questioned excitedly, at the same time beginning work upon the American's bonds.

"Quite all right," responded Chad. "Thank God you came! There may still be time."

"Time?" questioned the major.

"Time to give the operators of that gun false weather reports," responded Chad, getting to his feet and staggering drunkenly into the operations room. Two steps in the room, he pulled up with a surprised start. The German operator lay upon the floor, stone dead.

"I had to," explained Major Reaves. "He reached for his gun as I entered."

Chad dropped to his knees beside the dead man and began to run experienced fingers through the clothing. "I believe I've found it!" he exclaimed.

"Found what?" pressed the major.

"The code book!" responded Chad, holding it up. "A submarine is lying off the coast somewhere near by. Von Schletcher has been here, flashing weather reports to the submarine and having them relayed to Germany. Don't you see? We may be able to deflect their aim by giving them false reports."

"Some one's calling in code," exclaimed the English operator, who, upon being released, had immediately gone back to his old post.

"Take the message!" pressed Chad excitedly. "I'll decipher it."

For a moment there was tense silence. Then the operator's pencil began to move. As meaningless words appeared upon the paper pad, Chad's fingers began turning the leaves of the newly acquired code book furiously.

"They're giving their position," he said after several minutes of suspense. "Saint Lester's Cove. Want latest atmospheric reports."

He cut off abruptly, and a blazing light flashed into his eyes. With a surprising suddenness he thrust the code book into Major Reaves' hand, exclaiming at the same time, "I'm taking your car. Give them false reports. No time to explain."

Then he grabbed an automatic from one of Major Reaves's men and dashed from the room. He began shouting orders to the driver before he reached the car.

"It's all right, Brintley," called Major Reaves to the chauffeur.

Brintley's foot hit the starter, and with a roar of power the car was off for the English manor house and a tethered plane.

A wild ride followed. Then, as the headlights touched beams upon white brick walls ahead, Chad loosed his hold long enough to point directly.

"In there!" he yelled at the top of his voice.

The car quivered to the touch of quickly applied brakes, and skidded into the long driveway. Forms appeared in the rays of light that swept fanlike across the grounds.

"The plane's serviced, sir," greeted the chauffeur of the night before.

"Good!" exclaimed the American, his voice vibrant with an urge for haste. "Can you twist a prop?"

"Right, sir," responded the man, wheeling and making for the idle propeller.

CHAD lost no time. He threw one inspecting glance over his ship, then clambered into the cockpit. A minute later, the motor coughed into a roar, throwing out long, red exhaust flashes that played weirdly upon the surrounding faces.

Chad gunned the motor and guided the wabbling plane into the long runway laid down by the car's powerful headlights. Then over went the throttle to the last notch. A responding roar of power caught the plane and converted the wobble into an intoxicating dash down the field. Then wings took hold and the sturdy sky mount bore its sleuthing master into a night sky that shrieked out of exciting surprises and high adventure.

For a minute the lone flyer circled the field in an effort to gain altitude and get bearings. Then, as the radio station's beacons became visible off to the right, he leaned the stick and kicked the rudder bar. With a definite objective in mind, he straightened out and directed the plane's nose towards the north.

"Saint Lester's Cove. Send latest atmospheric reports." For a minute Chad turned the words of that ciphered message over in his mind. Then an ironic smile touched the corners of his lips.

"Special weather report for Karl von Schletcher," he murmured. "Storm bearing down with great speed."

Like a modern Jove, he hurled his man-made concentration of lightning tracers and racked thunderbolts across the moonlit sky. With hurricane speed he swept over villages and hamlets, and then, aided by the splendid visibility, he looked down upon a seemingly endless line of white breakers. Imbued with the idea that he was on the right trail and feeling strangely confident of success, Chad swung up the coast.

For ten minutes the American flew over a dreary track of deserted coast line. Then, as if from some impulse, he cut the throttle and nosed the plane earthward. Far ahead he had seen the luminous line of North Sea restlessness terminate abruptly. It meant but one

thing—the mouth of Saint Lester's Cove.

Not daring to risk a flare, Chad navigated for a long stretch of beach that loomed firm and compact in the moon's illumination. With veteran skill he leveled out and set the plane's wheels upon that improvised landing field. Before the prop ticked its last beat, he had leaped to the sand and begun an easy run up the beach.

For two miles the American kept up that pace, then slowed to a complete halt. The beach was narrowing rapidly and the shore line rising. From far ahead the crashing sound of waves beating against the base of cliffs warned of impassability.

Decision was instantaneous with the ex-New York crook chaser. He turned aside and began to climb the long general rise that terminated in a sharp line against the night sky. On the other side of that rim, he knew, lay the waters of Saint Lester's Cove.

After he had spent several minutes in climbing, Chad's experience in the crime field stood him in good stead. To his acute ears came the sound of a slight movement, and in response to that warning, he dropped instantly to the ground, his eyes darting searching glances in every direction.

Then he saw them—two men, obviously sentries, guarding a trail that approached the crest. The sight, instead of discouraging him, caused a quickening of his heart beat. Those two men would not be there unless something of importance was taking place on the other side of that rim against the sky.

Cautiously, on hands and knees, Chad resumed his climbing. Shielded by a shallow ravine, he crept to within ten yards of the unsuspecting guards. Then he was by them, and with a final spurt he had won the crest of the cliff. With heart thumping even more excitedly, he crawled to the very edge and looked down upon the moonlit waters of Saint Lester's Cove.

With the first breath-taking glance, Chad spotted it. Almost directly below and close inshore, a monstrous submarine hugged the surface of the restless waters. Shielded lights twinkled on a deck that hummed with activity.

Guttural voices, speaking in German, floated plainly up to the American's

pricked ears. And conspicuous among those voices was one that caused Chad to tense excitedly. Karl von Schletcher was down among those men, giving orders in a raucous commanding tone!

"Is everything ready?"

Chad heard the Prussian's question as plainly as if he were down upon that steel-plated deck. He heard an officer reply, "*Ja, Excellenz!*"

"Is the sky chart prepared?"

"*Ja, Excellenz.*"

"Good!" The exclamation carried a gloating note of triumph. "*Der Tag* is near, countrymen. The stupid English are already faltering. Prepare!"

"Clear the deck!" responded an officer in a staccato burst. "All men to stations!"

A mechanical grating sounded. The long super-structure on the forward deck began to open slowly. The grating stopped. Then, like the warning note of a snake preparing to strike, there arose a loud hissing sound.

Chad, his entire attention centered upon that forward deck, felt a clammy chill creep up his spine. From the super-structure there floated up a spectre upon which the moonlight shone with ghostly weirdness.

The hissing continued. The swaying spectre, like a cloud of thin mists undulating in the night breeze, began to rise higher, to fill out—to take form.

"My God!" burst Chad with an excitement born of discovery. "A balloon! A semi-transparent balloon!"

The hissing stopped. The semi-transparent balloon, now completely inflated, hovered about the submarine, dwarfing it under its rotund fullness. For a second all life seemed concentrated upon that swaying bag; then a Prussian's voice broke the silence.

"All is ready, *Excellenz!*"

"The explosive," questioned von Schletcher. "Is it set?"

Chad tensed excitedly at the question, waited even more excitedly for the answer.

"*Ja, Excellenz.*"

"And the whistles," pressed von Schletcher. "Have they been attached? Remember, it is a shell that falls in London tonight—not a bomb."

At those words something seemed to snap in Chad's brain. All his conjectures seemed to be blown skyward, then

to fall back in a logical and startling revelation. For a moment he was dazed. Then he was the old Chad again—the man of action, the tracker of men. With a muttered vow that neither bomb nor shell should fall in London that night, he swung around, took in the lay of the land, and began to retrace the course he had followed coming up.

Slowly and laboriously he made his way down to the shallow ravine. He had to fight back the impulse to leap to his feet, shoot the two guards, and make a dash for the beach and his waiting plane. But the will that had seen him successfully through many a dangerous task of shadowing criminals now came to his aid, leading him slowly and surely past the posted guards and to the firm sands of the beach.

Then he was away—away at a run that saw no slackening until his tethered sky mount had been reached. It was hardly a minute before he sprang to the propeller and gave it a powerful twist. At the responding roar, he ran for the cockpit. A moment later the sturdy sky mount leaped forward, gained speed in a short run down the beach, winged into its medium, and swept up the coast.

With the cliff looming ahead, Chad pulled hard back on the stick. The plane zoomed skyward, hung poised for a moment, then dropped towards the waters of Saint Lester's Cove.

"Storm bearing down!" mocked Chad ironically, his body hunched forward, fingers tense upon Bowdens, lips set to scream out that exultant cry of triumph. But instead of a scream of triumph, it was an oath that hissed through the flyer's lips. Simultaneously with that oath, the flame went out of his eyes and a dark cloud of chagrin swept over his face. The balloon was gone! It was released upon a mission, the success of which would throw London into a frenzy of terror.

A wave of hot anger swept over Chad Brock. For a minute he expended it upon the steel monster below, lashing it with stinging tracers. Men crumpled under the hail of leaden death. Screams of agony blended with mad, vengeful shouts. Scrambling like rats, the survivors fought for the conning tower.

But the fate of the submarine had

been decreed. Skimming low above its steel-plated back, Chad released one of the two bombs he always carried. It exploded with a deafening roar, ripping open a wound through which gushed the treacherous waters of the cove. A minute later, a blotch of black oil shrouded the final resting place of another German U-boat.

But Chad did not stay to see the finish. Realizing that the sea terror was fatally wounded, he had pulled back on the stick and sent his sky mount climbing into the heavens. Up there somewhere was a balloon—a balloon that should not be allowed to keep its rendezvous.

BUT after all his years of flying, Chad was then to discover that the sky was wide and deep, and that the currents that swept through its limitless expanse were many and unmarked. Then, too, the moon would soon sink its face below the western horizon.

Determination set his chin; destiny aimed the nose of his ship. Sixty minutes of flying rewarded him, for with the glare of London's lights faintly visible to the south, he stumbled upon the phantom raider. But even as he did so, the balloon leaped towards the stars, with its rider releasing all ballast.

Chad pulled back on the stick and zoomed in pursuit. Up, up, up climbed the plane, each trail of tracers clearly demonstrating the rapidity with which the balloon was being overhauled. But when success seemed certain—when tracers almost made contact with the small, suspended basket—the propeller began to lash the thin air with discouraging futility. The plane had reached its ceiling.

For a minute, Chad suffered all the pangs of helplessness that can be loosened upon a human being. Looking up at the balloon that hovered tauntingly beyond the reach of his guns, he cursed. Then directing his gaze towards London's lights, he saw their glare slowly fade. A moment later long shafts of light began to lance the sky weirdly, vainly. The city had been warned—warned that a German gun was about to launch another shell.

The sight called forth all the ingenuity the American possessed. The

shifting shafts were like frantic pleas—pleas sent up by a group of harassed officers. Chad had the sensation of eyes watching him—eyes begging him to destroy that part of a fiendish scheme hovering above. How could he reach that balloon before it was too late?

The solution was so simple that it momentarily startled him. With an excited gasp of joy, he put the nose of his wavering plane straight down. Even as he did so, his free hand reached for the Very pistol.

Five minutes later that pistol hurled two streamers of colored light out into the night sky. In response to the signal, ground lights flared up, illuminating a large field with massive hangars lined on one side. It was the Kempster Depot, home of the blimps that patrolled England's coast line.

Chad set his wheels upon that field with a reckless speed. The very nature of the arrival warned the onlookers that the newcomer was fighting against time and delay. Officers crowded about him as he leaped from the cockpit. One stepped forward, but before he could speak, Chad blurted excitedly, "I'm Captain Brock of Allied Intelligence, operating out of Paris. I need a blimp at once. There isn't time to explain."

It was but a matter of minutes before Chad found himself in command of a blimp, its nose pointed skyward, its engines pushing with all their power. His crew of three stood at their posts, ready for orders.

Chad watched the height indicator for a minute. "Drop all ballast!" he yelled above the deep-throated roar of the Rolls Royce motors.

AS the sand streamed earthward, the blimp seemed to leap for the heights with renewed vigor. Still, that was not fast enough. Von Schletcher must be stopped before he reached the air above London.

Chad looked around, his eyes searching for more weight to be heaved overboard. He reached an instant decision. "You two," he took in the two gunners with his gesture, "will have to go."

The men voiced no objections. They immediately climbed over the rail, steadied themselves for a moment, then dropped off into space. Like magic flow-

ers, their parachutes blossomed above their heads.

Up leaped the blimp, the height indicator moving with double its former speed. Up, up, the motors valiantly lending their power to the lift of the encased gas.

Chad glanced at the height indicator for the hundredth time. "Eighteen thousand," he called to the engineer. "Keep your eyes open!"

More minutes crawled by. Chad felt cold sweat popping out over his body as he realized that they were swiftly nearing the outskirts of London. Nervously, frantically, he swept the sky with his gaze.

"Speck off starboard—thousand feet up!" cried the engineer suddenly.

Chad followed the man's directing. His heart pounded out a tremendous thump as he recognized the tiny basket of the semi-transparent balloon. With a whirl of the wheel he changed the blimp's course and waited tensely for the gap to close up.

"We're over the lakes," cried the engineer a minute later.

"Take the starboard gun and see if you can reach her," ordered Chad. "Shoot for the basket."

The engineer sprang for the Lewis and swung it upon its mounting. But even as he did so, a stream of tracers hissed down from the basket above.

"He's got a machine gun!" groaned Chad.

"And we're hit!" echoed the engineer.

Chad turned just in time to see flames leap up around one of the engines. "Jump!" he cried without a second's hesitation. "It's an order," he rasped, as the Englishman seemed reluctant.

The engineer stepped to the rail and dived overboard. Freed of his weight, the balloon jerked upward, flames from the engine licking greedily towards the bag and threatening each second to explode the compressed hydrogen.

Stified by the fumes, Chad staggered to the gun. Gripping the handle, he swung the muzzle upward.

One long steady stream—then suddenly the heavens were split by a titanic explosion. Von Schletcher's plot had turned upon its master.

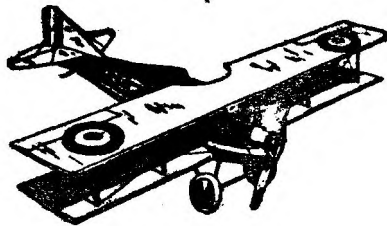
Without a second's delay, Chad bailed out. And he was not a moment too soon, for hardly had his parachute opened when the flames from the engine reached the gas-filled bag. Another, though far lesser, explosion shook the heavens, and then quiet shrouded the sky above London.

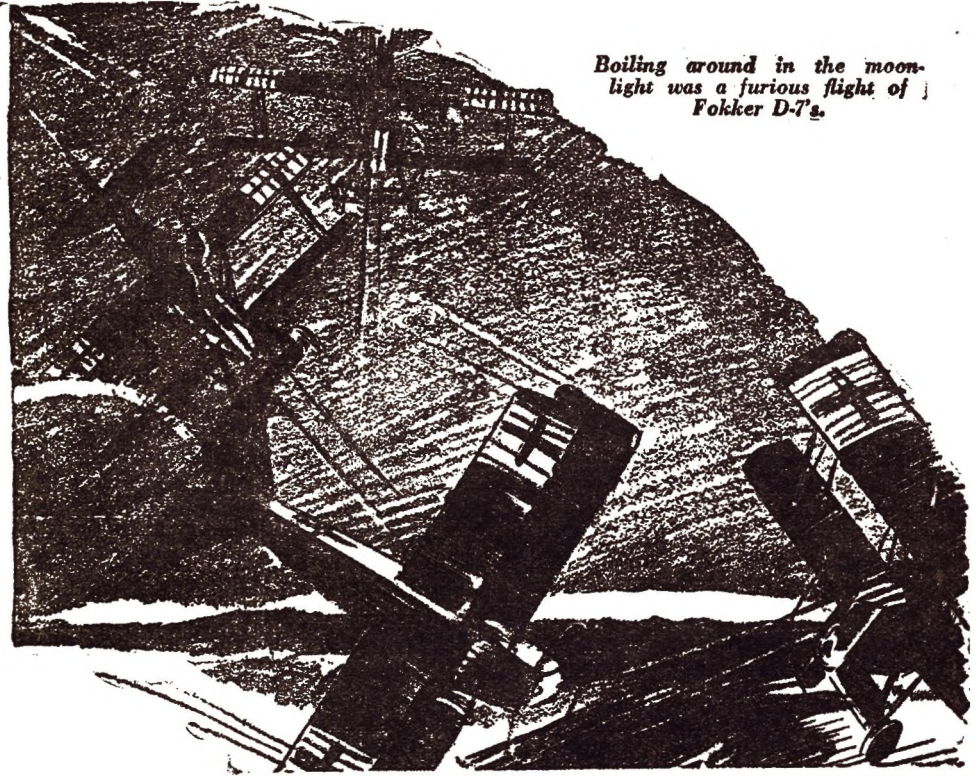
An hour later, Chad finished his brief explanation to the group of wide-eyed officers in General Pittingham's office.

"And Karl von Schletcher will trouble the world no more," he ended.

"Then you not only frustrated a fiendish plot, you fulfilled your mission to London," spoke General Pittingham. "You got your man."

Chad nodded. "It's the code of the New York cops!" he replied simply.





Boiling around in the moonlight was a furious flight of Fokker D-7's.

Pin Money Pilots

By CLIFF HOWE

Down toward that clearing forty feet deep in Germany roared the Yank two-seater. Boche soldiers might be lurking behind every tree — Boche machine guns might be hidden there. But on the ground was that man in a tattered Yank uniform signaling a frantic S.O.S.!

HANK BRADY yelled. He flailed pudgy arms like an overgrown whiskered cupid trying his wings. He pointed excitedly with both hands.

"See it! To the right, Tim! Over by that thing that looks like a barn!"

Pilot Tim O'Gara crushed the stick to his right knee, trod rudder lightly. The two-seater Salmson went reeling around in a hot German sky. O'Gara scowled overside.

"I see it now." He was tall, so tremendously tall that his bony frame seemed to have been folded several

times to get it in the cockpit. Untangling a gaunt arm, he swabbed castor film off goggle lenses. "What of it?"

Brady swore into the talk-set connecting the pits. He had an exuberant voice which made him seem in a state of continual excitement. He wore a horseshoe-nail ring on his left little finger.

"It's some bird signaling us! Ain't you going down?"

"You fat ape!" O'Gara swore back at him amiably. "We're forty miles deep in Germany!"

There was level country below, some

brush, and a big clearing with a great box of an unpainted wooden building jutting up on one side.

In the clearing a man jumped about, gesticulating. And as they approached, he completed the arrangement of a series of cloth stripes into those letters of universal distress and appeal:

S. O. S.

Brady used binoculars. "He's wearing what's left of a Yank uniform. All torn and muddy! He's waving for us to come down. He wants to talk to us."

"So does the Kaiser." O'Gara contorted in the front pit, and the Salmson snapped level as though it had hit something solid.

"Hey!" Brady yelled. "Ain't you—"

"You're a swell egg," O'Gara rumbled into the talk-set. "But you ain't got good sense. So t'hell with you. T'hell with that guy, too!"

Brady squinted at the back of O'Gara's head. It was a very long head for its width. O'Gara's helmet had a rip across the top—a rip opened by a Spandau slug some days past. Through the hole a tuft of his reddish hair projected like an Indian war feather.

"That bird may be a Yank escaped from a Kraut prison camp," Brady suggested.

"Ever hunt turkey-buzzards?" O'Gara inquired.

"No. What has that got to do—"

"You picket a turkey-buzzard to a peg in the ground," O'Gara interrupted. "Then you hide in the brush. The buzzard on the ground flaps his wings and the other buzzards in the air get curious and come down. Then—"

"I see. You think this may be a trick?"

"Uh-huh."

"An' you're gonna fly off and leave that guy?"

"Sure."

Brady settled down comfortably in the pit bucket. "All right. Let's fly."

The Salmson upended, went roaring down for the man who gestured in the clearing.

HANK BRADY laughed. He had known all along that O'Gara intended to land in the clearing. Tim O'Gara was like that, always declaring seriously he did not intend to do something he knew very well he was going to

do. He would look solemnly at a bottle of red liquor, proclaim the stuff poison, assert he would never touch another drop—and drain the bottle.

Tilting out of the dive, the Salmson went bawling around the clearing. The brush below was scattering—scrawny. Germans could hardly conceal themselves in it.

"They wouldn't be hid in that barn with machine guns," rumbled O'Gara. "A Heinie wouldn't pull a lousy trick like that."

"Says you!" snorted Brady.

"Sure they wouldn't! If we was to shoot that barn full of holes, it might ruin it. We wouldn't want to do that."

O'Gara promptly heaved the Salmson at the building and snugged on the Bowden trips. The cowl guns rattled and streamed lead into the structure. Brady swung the Scarff-mounted aft pit guns on the barn. Ripping .30-calibre slugs searched every inch of the building. Siding boards splintered off. Shingles were scooped high in the air.

In the clearing, beside the cloth strips that spelled "S. O. S." the man in the ragged, muddy Yank uniform continued to wave his arms.

"Well?" Brady demanded. "There was nobody in the barn."

O'Gara wet his lips. He had a jaw so huge it concealed his neck.

"No kidding," he complained, "I think we better go home."

He skidded the Salmson around, tailed speed away and prepared to land. Brady rolled his head on fat shoulders, scrutinizing the sky. It was an empty dome of glaring blue. No Boche ships seemed about.

The rubber wheel doughnuts hissed on the clearing grass. They bumped, bumped again and all the plane began to rattle. It was not the best place for a set-down—that clearing.

The ship clattered past the cloth strips. They were wider than had appeared from the air, near three feet. Apparently they were torn from a tarpaulin hayrick cover.

The man in the tattered Yank uniform, pursued them. The Salmson jarred to a stop, prop barely kicking over.

"You stick here!" O'Gara rapped. He raced a glance about. "There doesn't seem to be anybody around but this bird. But you stay in the bus, anyhow!"

He stood up, unfolding in the pit like one of these collapsible arms to which telephones are attached. He met the man in the disheveled Yank attire thirty feet from the plane.

The man was bony, broad. A hook nose gave him a witchlike aspect. His lips warped a grin made snaggy by big, widely spaced teeth. When he spoke, he seemed to blow his words through these spaces between his teeth.

"I am a Yank flyer, I escaped from a Boche prison camp. Can you haul me over the lines?"

O'Gara ran eyes up and down the fellow, didn't like his looks. "Name and outfit?" he demanded.

"I got my papers," the man said. "The Boche let me keep them!" He pulled papers out of his ragged clothes, extended them.

Tall Tim O'Gara folded over to study them. They seemed genuine.

A SHOT—it came from the canvas strips pegged to the ground—sent a sudden cracking sound across the clearing.

O'Gara slanted a glance at the plane. Hank Brady, hands flipping feebly, was toppling backward off the cockpit rim. Crimson spread on his forehead—it looked to Tim as if he had been shot between the eyes!

O'Gara jerked his gaze back to the canvas strips. A man had been concealed in a depression under one of them. A man in the high-necked jacket of the German Imperial Air Force! He was still sighting down the barrel of a Mauser pistol that had a snout like a pencil.

The man who'd been waving jabbed thin fingers into O'Gara's eyes. Blinded, O'Gara bellowed, struck out furiously. His left fist collapsed the man. O'Gara piled on top of him, fists whistling and thudding.

"Helmer!" squawled his opponent. "Hilfe! Help!"

O'Gara heard the man who had shot Brady pound up. The Boche—there was no doubt now about the ragged man being a Boche—tried to get out a gun. O'Gara got his wrist, bent the weapon out of his hand, then scooped it up.

The heavy mechanism of Helmer's Mauser clanked on his head, Stunned, O'Gara pawed for the safety on the gun in his hand. It was another Mauser. He

didn't know German weapons very well, and was having trouble finding the safety in his dazed condition.

He was hit on the head again, and felt his face grind into grass and earth. A boot stamped the Mauser out of his fingers.

"Don't kill him, Helmer!" gasped the witch of a man.

Another head blow toppled O'Gara. He was tumbled on his back. Steel encircled his wrists and ankles. Handcuffs!

Bonhag and Helmer searched O'Gara, then arose. The tall Yank flounced about weakly, then managed to sit up and rub his eyes with his knees. From the smarting in his orbs he decided that Bonhag must have had snuff on his fingers. Pain-brought tears gradually washed the stuff out of his eyes and he could see.

"Quick!" ordered Bonhag. "Swing the plane around. I will take off with him at once. Some one might have heard them machine-gun the barn."

Through a cataract of tears, O'Gara saw Helmer run to the Salmson. The man was stocky, bloated, pale of skin.

Helmer kicked the body of Hank Brady. When it only rolled loosely, he ignored it, sprang into the plane and gave the throttle a goose and the rudder a boot. The plane skidded around and jounced up.

Bonhag was peeling off his Yank uniform, revealing the attire of a Boche *Unteroffizier*. He threw the Yank garments at O'Gara.

"Those belonged to another fool we tricked as we did you," he hissed through his teeth. "But we had the bad luck to kill the idiot, trying to capture him."

O'GARA let that soak in. It explained the papers Bonhag had jammed under his nose, also. These two had been trying to capture a Yank flyer alive. Why? For no savory reason, he was certain. These two might wear the uniforms of the German Imperial Air Force, but they were not up to the Kaiser's standard. The run of Boche flyers was not much different than the Allied flyers they swapped lead with, O'Gara had long ago learned.

But this Bonhag and Helmer were bad. Their apprehension that the machine-gun shots had been heard showed they were doing something under-handed.

"What's the idea?" O'Gara demanded. Bonhag ignored him, threw com-

mands at Helmer. "Help me put this man in the plane. I will pilot it. You leave here at once. You know the preparations you are to make—in case things go wrong. Make them!"

They boosted O'Gara in the Salmson, tore holes in the doped cockpit fabric and ran the handcuffs around a fuselage stringer.

"We were most fortunate to capture him in time!" Bonhag shouted through his teeth at Helmer. "Take care no one sees you. It would not do to have this fail now, after we have made ready with such care!"

The Salmson stacks honked loudly. The two-seater jounced ahead and loosened its tailskid from the earth. As it took the air, O'Gara wished that his knowledge of the German language were more developed. He understood it only after a fashion.

He looked back, down. Squat Helmer was dogtrotting out of the clearing. The form of Hank Brady lay motionless, grotesquely sprawled. O'Gara ground a brittle invective past his teeth. He wrenched at the handcuffs, but they only peeled his wrists.

The Salmson was clubbing in the general direction of Berlin, and grabbing altitude steadily. The sun, a shimmering ball, was preparing to bed itself in the horizon of France. Height made cold—and the Salmson labored and grunted like a hog on ice. Rearing up, O'Gara got a look at the altimeter. Seventeen thousand! He settled back, surprised. He hadn't known the old bus would go that high.

Dusk gushed darksome shadows over the face of Germany. White, detached, stringing cirrus clouds enwrapped them like torn cotton. The fuel-gauge needle sank until less than half an hour's supply was left. The sun was half a shimmering ball now.

Bonhag abruptly cut the ignition and shot the Salmson down in a leisurely glide.

THEY landed in a deserted clearing—not the one from which they had taken off.

Helmer, his pale, fat face a gray blot in the murk, was there to meet them.

"You did what you were to do?" Bonhag asked him.

"Ja," said Helmer. "All is ready. But I hope it was an unneeded precaution."

O'Gara, tall forehead wrinkled, managed to understand their words, but he was not enlightened much.

They freed his handcuffs from the fuselage stringer and goaded him out of the plane with Mauser snouts. Then they strong-armed the plane about so that it was ready for a take-off. He was astounded when they hauled out fuel tins and gassed the crate.

Bonhag came over, unlocked the cuffs from his ankles, and ordered, "Walk—silently!"

O'Gara hesitated. They wanted him alive—were not anxious to kill him. He swore at them, but did not move. Bonhag promptly knocked him down. They fought a little. O'Gara, wrists manacled, was mauled unmercifully until he desisted. Bonhag, seated astride his chest, clicked a Mauser snout forcibly against his teeth.

"You will do as I say," Bonhag ordered, "and you will be able to return to France none the worse for your experience!"

None the worse! O'Gara thought of Hang Brady and rage turned his face hotly scarlet.

Helmer made uneasy grunting noises. "*Nein!* I fear he will give us trouble! We should have killed this one instead of his friend. That is too bad! Maybe we better slay him now and do the job ourselves, as we had considered doing should we be unable to capture an enemy flyer."

"Impossible!" Bonhag snorted through his teeth. "We are none too savory of record, you and I, Helmer. They would suspect us. And they would watch and watch until they caught us. *Nein!* We will use this Yankee. He will do it, once he understands he is to go free afterward."

He jammed his face into O'Gara's. "You are to be freed if you obey me! Otherwise you die!" He spoke it in English.

O'Gara blinked. So they did intend to turn him loose eventually! He decided to string along with them and see what was up. He growled, got to his feet.

Bonhag and Helmer flanked him with ready Mausers. They left the clearing, shoved through brush, went ahead more rapidly with a path underfoot.

"Remember well the route we are tak-

ing!" Bonhag swished past his teeth. "You will be released to follow it and return to your plane!"

O'Gara said nothing, but strode ahead, rage burning him like a fever.

SOMEWHERE immediately ahead, a Mercedes motor whanged into life, ran a while, and was silenced. Vagrant night breeze brought conglomerate odors of a drome—grease, oil, gas, dope, cooking smells. Dishes clattered. Men sang "*Deutschland Uber Alles*" to the accompaniment of a violin.

"Ach!" grunted Helmer. "Let us hope we are not too late!"

"Ruhig!" hissed Bonhag. "Quiet!"

The two Germans knew a way of getting into their *Jagdstaffel* lair without being challenged by sentries. They crawled in bushes, kneeled down in a none-too-clean drainage ditch and haunted the shadows of ramshackle buildings. O'Gara, vastly intrigued now, went with them readily.

"Remember especially the last of our route," Bonhag breathed in O'Gara's face. "It is best you depart the same way."

O'Gara wrinkled his nose. The fellow's breath had a damnable odor.

A few yards further, and Helmer said, "I leave you here."

"Ja," Bonhag agreed, and thorned O'Gara with a tapering Mauser muzzle. "One wrong move, my Yankee friend, and I'll shoot you and say I found you crawling, a spy, on our drome."

O'Gara swallowed twice to clear his throat of crashing rage, then said, "I'm with you!"

Boche flyers and greaseballs passed and repassed. Moving when no one was near, Bonhag reached a long building. The front was lighted. O'Gara got the idea it was the *Jagdstaffel* operations office.

Bonhag tried a door in the rear. It leafed inward, noiseless on its hinges. The room beyond was dark.

"Remove your boots!" commanded Bonhag. O'Gara complied, noting that Bonhag was also getting rid of his clumsy footwear.

The Mauser snout pricked O'Gara into the room. Voices and light came through cracks in the partition.

"A noise means your death!" Bonhag whispered. He sounded uneasy.

O'Gara got his eye to one of the cracks. Two high-ranking German officers were in the room beyond. Both were erect, well-fed, not unpleasant of face. One was a bit the more bronzed, and evidently did a little flying. The other had dust on his uniform, a ring of it caked around his mouth.

They were talking, and O'Gara began to give his scant knowledge of German a workout.

"You have a plane and pilot ready?" asked the man with the dust dried on his lips.

"Ja," said the other Boche. "Everything is in readiness. The motor of the plane was tested a moment ago. Your pilot, one of my best men, is eating now."

The other nodded, doubled to lift a black bag from between his feet. He deposited the bag on a table, unlocked it, and jerked it open by the handles.

A package wrapped in green paper, and somewhat larger than a shoe box, came out—then an envelope, brown, heavy, important-looking.

The man looked up. "You are aware of my mission? The exact nature of it, that is?"

His companion nodded. "Most certainly! We were informed of it some days ago. I am surprised that there was not more secrecy."

The other shrugged. "It was not necessary. No one but myself and the chief of the Imperial Intelligence knows the exact spot in France where I am to drop this tonight."

He put a hand on the big, green package. "We have been transferring this stuff to Switzerland or Holland, both neutral countries, thence into France as though it were the transaction of some commercial company. But recently the French have discovered our method." He laughed. "Now they are watching transfers of commercial concerns very closely."

He shifted his hand to the envelope. "These papers are of more importance, though. Important to the enemy, that is. They contain the names and present addresses of some thirty agents of the Imperial German Intelligence who have entered France recently. It is imperative that the information reach the chief of our Intelligence in Paris so that he can get in touch with them."

Tim O'Gara had been drinking it in.

He could understand enough of the German to get the full meaning.

There was a breath of movement beside him. It was witchlike Bonhag, reaching for a door in the partition. He held his Mauser—ready to shoot into the room!

Thoughts bounced in O'Gara's head like dropped marbles. Were Bonhag and Helmer Allied agents after that stuff in the other room? The idea was too wild—impossible.

O'Gara stopped thinking about it and went into action. He gave Bonhag a mighty kick in the stern. As Bonhag squawked and fell down, O'Gara managed to kick his temple. Bonhag squirmed, partly out.

O'Gara hunkered down like a Russian dancer, and, with hands handcuffed at his back, found the Mauser. The safety was off. He fired it twice through the door.

Doubling, contorting, O'Gara then sought to step over the cuff chains and get his hands before him.

HE ACCOMPLISHED the feat after a couple of stopwatch split seconds that seemed like years. With a savage rip he tore a pocket out of Bonhag's jacket, and tightened his fingers about the cuff key. He pocketed the metal sliver for use in the future. Lights went out in the other room.

He lowered to hands and knees and knocked open the partition door. Guns blazed; lead blasted above him. He threw up a hand and shot once so he would seem to be standing. Into the room he scuttled under a bellowing barrage of shots.

A slug burned his arm. Another tore up the floor under his fingers with such violence that he thought for an instant his hand was shot off.

He poked the Mauser at the leaping scarlet that marked a stuttering gun and let go. A man gave a strange, peaceful sort of a sigh and fell loudly on the floor.

O'Gara jumped clear as the other Boche shot at the Mauser lightning. A hand found the table, brushed across it. Groping fingers came to where the green package and the big envelope should be. Nothing was there but varnished table top.

Exploring more extensively, his fingers encountered a paper. It was a single

sheet, so could not be what he wanted. His fingers brushed it onto the floor and he let it go.

O'Gara forgot himself so far as to swear loudly. The German in the other room shot at the cussword, and his bullet did something shocking and painful to O'Gara's side.

A hand clapped over his side—he could feel at least one rib shattered—O'Gara made for the outer night.

The *Jagdstaffel* lair was in an uproar. Excited Teutonic yells leaped across the tarmac in waves. A siren was hooting an eerie, nerve-chilling note that rose and fell.

A searchlight planked white brilliance against the operations office building as O'Gara came out. He toppled back inside, took a rest on the door jamb with the Mauser. The Mauser had sights like a rifle. It shot like a rifle. His first slug doused the searchlight.

But the Boche had seen him. Yelping gutturals, they converged on the shack, and to help things along, the German in the other room came to the partition door and tried to shoot O'Gara.

As silently as possible, O'Gara unlocked the handcuffs, then threw the steel circles across the room. The German was too canny for that one. O'Gara decided he would be near the door and plugged two shots into the partition.

After that he heard the Kraut back-paddle across the other room, breath a painful whistle in his teeth—the man had been hit.

O'Gara sidled to the door. Germans had encircled nearer, a sullen cloud which spattered shots from its edges.

O'Gara gathered his shirt close to his wounded side and crouched for a lunge outside. He had a long-shot chance to run for it now. He wouldn't have a look-in when they got another searchlight on the shack. They'd do that soon.

He gritted, "Here goes!" and shot forward. But he dashed out an arm to the door jamb and held himself inside.

A Spandau gun had opened on the Boche rushing the shack.

THE machine gun was firing from the aft cockpit of an Albatros on the opposite tarmac edge. Evidently the plane was the one made ready for the flight into France.

Spandau slugs hissed across the tarmac

in a hosing stream. They dug up long clouds of dirt; they ricocheted with piercing squeaks, they found lodgment in human forms with jarring impacts that sounded like light fist blows.

O'Gara's thoughts careened from one possibility to another. Witchlike Bonhag? Pale pig of a Helmer? Maybe they wanted him to get away badly enough to murder their comrades. But he couldn't see why.

He decided to waste some time. He ran back into the other room; picked a match out of his shirt, and tried to strike the first one on the pants leg of his wounded side, but got the head sodden. He ripped a second aflame on the other leg, and saw one Boche out of commission on the floor; no sign of the other Boche, nor trace of either green package or heavy brown envelope—somebody had taken them.

The breeze, as he whirled, spun through the partition door and crossed the back room and blew the match out. Into the night he pitched.

The Spandau gun was still gobbling its five hundred or so a minute. The Boche had temporarily given up all ideas but hunting cover. O'Gara legged it across the tarmac. A searchlight on the edge of the field was trying to reach the shack, but it had never been installed to light its own drome. The hump of a hangar interfered.

Nobody shot at O'Gara. Either they had lost interest in him, or everybody at the moment was running away from the shack. Bushes swelled up before him. He got into them with a long leap, veered around to make for the Albatros, on the aft-pit rim of which the Spandau was rattling its anthem of death.

Another searchlight strung a swelling rod of calcium glare into the sky. The beam tilted down by sporadic jumps, like a dog approaching a coiled snake, until the Albatros was buried in the white glitter.

The Spandau on the Albatros abruptly cackled its last. A squat figure popped out of the pit like an apple seed from between squeezing fingers.

"Helmer!" O'Gara thought.

Then he took another look. He choked. His eyes threatened to escape from their lids. Twice he tried before he could get words out.

"Hank Brady!" His yell was loud enough to carry to France.

Hank Brady it was! He had a handkerchief bandage about his head.

Halting, he stood in the searchlight, waved his arms and pointed. Then he plunged off in the direction he had indicated. A rattling hail of bullets pursued him.

TIM O'GARA rushed to overhaul Brady. The cupidlike fellow had taken a direction almost opposite to that in which their Salmson lay gassed and ready for a hop.

O'Gara stopped suddenly. Brady wasn't sap enough to stand in that searchlight and point the way he was going so that the Boche could see! O'Gara thought of his own contrary habit of indicating exactly the opposite of what he intended. Brady must have borrowed the trait!

The gaunt, bony flyer veered to meet Brady—should Brady take exactly the opposite direction to that he had pointed out.

He could hear Germans pouring across the tarmac in a baying pack. Guns still cracked wildly. An officer was bawling for the shooting to stop so they could listen and hear something. Leaves rustled ahead.

"Brady!" O'Gara called.

"Here, you animated skeleton!" came Hank Brady's voice.

"You fat ape!" O'Gara chuckled. "How come you're still on this old ball of mud?"

"That Heinie—the one hid under the canvas S. O. S. they had fixed up—his slug only cut my head open a little. Didn't even knock me out. I saw it'd be suicide to tangle in that fight when they grabbed you. I didn't have a gun. So I used that horse-shoe-nail ring of mine to gouge myself between the eyes as if I'd been shot there." He swore cheerfully. "I bet the hole I dug leaves a dimple for life. Anyway, it fooled that pale, pig-faced Kraut. I been following him all evening." They ran through the brush. Leaves whipped their faces. Brady took the lead. O'Gara, a hand clamped to his clipped side, found motion agonizing business.

"You followed him when he met the Salmson as it landed the second time?" O'Gara grunted.

"Sure. I was tramping your heels. But I didn't have a gun, and they had theirs right in their slats. I hunted all

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over that woods for a club. It was the most clubless woods I ever saw."

O'Gara chuckled. It had a gritting, rusty sound.

"You hit?" Brady demanded.

"Uh-huh. Cracked stave. I'll stand it all right."

Brady slowed his pace, but increased it when O'Gara growled at him. They were silent, except for O'Gara's heavy, painful breathing. They could tell by the yelling of the Germans that the pointing ruse had been discovered. No doubt Boche were casting about for the trail.

"Can a *Dachshund* trail a man?" Brady demanded anxiously.

"Shut up!" O'Gara laughed. "Run!"

Their breath became labored. Sweat drenched their faces making a sticky base for cobwebs, dust and small insects from the undergrowth. O'Gara decided they were near the clearing where the Salmson had been left.

"Heads up!" he warned. "Bonhag and Helmer may be around here!"

"Nix," said Brady. "I know all about them cookies. I know right where they're at!"

The clearing abruptly took them into its clean open. They sprinted for the Salmson. Overhead, the sky was clouding rapidly, making the night quite dark.

Hank Brady reached the ship first, draped over the pit rim and turned on the ignition switch.

"Want me to fly this bus back?" he demanded?"

O'Gara laughed raspingly. "Hell, no! I'll fly it myself! After coming this far, I want to get home."

HANK BRADY gave the prop a dance. The Salmson chugged, failed to keep turning over.

"Listen!" Brady called.

O'Gara put his hands back of his ears. He heard the sound of a plane coming toward them at high speed.

"Our sweethearts!" Brady yelled. "Bonhag and Helmer! They're in a Yank plane they had hid out in another clearing."

O'Gara clicked his teeth together. "It must be the crate of that other Yank they told me they decoyed down and killed. This is a sweet mess. Why didn't you jim that ark so it wouldn't hop?"

"Horsefies! How was I to know we might not need the bus ourselves? Contact!"

The Salmson gug-guggled a couple of times, then began to explode more evenly. Brady crawled under a wing-bank and inserted his pudgy frame in the aft bucket.

They sat there, waiting for the Salmson to heat. Their eyes screened the sky. The other plane must be having trouble finding this clearing in the darkness.

"They out for our hides?" O'Gara demanded.

"Are they!" Brady laughed raucously. "We're the rope around their necks." He drove a long glance at the sky. "Hey, guy, you better see if this thing has wings. Clouds are gonna be off the moon in a minute and it'll be plenty light."

O'Gara sawed the throttle open. The Salmson revved up without a catch. The ship stumbled ahead. Tail up, it became light on the ground. Above, clouds split and let through shafts of moonlight as bright as nickel-plate. O'Gara picked the Salmson off, slanted it over a low parapet of brush.

He kicked a bank, pointed for France. In the rear pit, Brady began to talk profanely to himself.

O'Gara turned and stared back. A plane was sledding down the sky at them. A Liberty-motored De Havilland. A two-seater!

"Hey!" he yelled. "I thought it was a pursuit job!"

Brady gave the Scarff mount a couple of tentative jerks. "I didn't say that, did I? Some bird must have had it up alone for a joy hop when they tricked him down with those cloth letters."

He stood up in the pit, fished with the crossed wires in his sight ring. The Lewis pair spat flame from belled snouts. The breech mechanism leaked grayish smoke. Recoil battered the plane.

The diving De Havilland fluttered scarlet eyes behind the prop. O'Gara looked up, saw tracer smoke very near, and stiff-armed the stick. Down went the Salmson, then up again in a sharp V of an angle.

The De Havilland lost them off its sights. With no time to correct aim, the ship volleyed over the Salmson. O'Gara instantly slammed the Salmson under the tail of the other craft, one of the few blind spots the D.H. had.

Brady began yelling in the rear cockpit again. "Hey—the other guests are arriving!"

O'GARA had seen them. They looked like a scattering flight of birds in the moonlight. Fokkers! Single-seater, Maltese-crossed D-7's were boiling up from the Boche drome!

That meant the Germans were a pursuit outfit. The Albatros two-seater had led O'Gara to the belief that the drome housed observation ships. That was wrong. The Albatros must have been brought to the Jagdstaffel lair especially for the flight into France.

"Loop!" Brady was shouting. "Make 'em loop, Tim! Or maybe an Immelmann will do!"

O'Gara turned his head. "What the—"

Brady waved at the De Havilland. "Make 'em turn upside down somehow!"

O'Gara swore, bobbed a nod. He tilted up under the tailskid of the D.H. His cowl guns rattled a burst. The D.H. whipped right, left. O'Gara tormented it with another burst. In the rear pit, Brady was muscling the Lewis pair over his head.

From the Fokker horde, tracer began to crawl up and dot the moonlight with hot, rapidly moving sparks. But they were not yet within Spandau range.

Overhead, the D.H. banked. O'Gara followed it, keeping the shelter of the empennage by masterful maneuvering. The D.H. dodged wildly. But O'Gara, growling, thinking of the cold-blooded attempt to murder Hank Brady, stuck to it like a hungry gadfly.

However, he continually left an out for the D.H.—gave Bonhag and Helmer a chance to loop. He did not know why Brady wanted them to go over, but there was no time to ask.

Bonhag and Helmer did it at last. Up and over in a tight loop curled the D.H. At the crest of the maneuver, the fight seemed suddenly to leave the pair. They rolled level, making it an Immelmann, and slanted down in a steep dive. In full flight!

"Got 'em!" squawked Brady. "They don't dare use their guns! That loop soaked their plane with gas! I cut open the top of their fuel tank with my pocket knife this afternoon!"

O'Gara ruddered the Salmson after the De Havilland. So that was Hank

Brady's ace-in-the-hole! He fished for the D.H., which was below now. His cowl vickers hammered seven times apiece, and the short burst set the D.H. to waltzing wildly from side to side.

Then Bonhag and Helmer careened madly for the climbing Fokker pack. O'Gara cannoned after them a few hundred feet, abruptly yanked the Salmson level, and scowled overside.

"We can lick that Fokker crew," he said enigmatically.

"Yeah—in a dream," Brady snorted. "Let's stick around and see what happens." He threw his eyes skyward. "That cloud is gonna cover the moon again before long and we can get away easy."

The Fokkers climbed. The D.H. went down to meet them. For a minute the ships intermingled. A light glowed in the D.H.—evidently a flash that Bonhag and Helmer were turning on their faces and Boche uniforms.

Then fully half a dozen Fokkers pounced savagely on the D.H. Spandaus frittered powder blaze.

The D.H. heaved. Amidships, it sprouted a smear of flame. The smear spread, enveloping fuselage and wing banks. The De Havilland heaved over and reeled for the topsoil of Germany.

"They got my note," Brady said.

A COUPLE of Spandau slugs dinged on the Salmson fuselage somewhere. O'Gara got the ship hoicking for France before he spoke.

"Note?" he demanded. "What note?"

"The one I left on the table in the Kraut operations office," Brady shouted. "It told all the dirt on Bonhag and Helmer. I wrote it before the excitement started in the shack."

O'Gara remembered the paper he had pushed from the table to the floor. He remembered also that the Boche were proud of their outfits, would go to fanatical limits to avert disgrace. He swore. They had given Bonhag and Helmer drumhead justice.

"You rushed into that operations office before I did?"

"Sure," laughed Brady. "I turned out the light. That pig-faced Helmer knew I went in, too. That's why they tried to nail us."

O'Gara pressed an elbow to his side. The wound was filling his whole frame

with numb ache. A shower of Spandau iron clattered on the Salmson.

He ruddered out of the fire, and sa.d, "Bonhag and Helmer captured me to use for a goat. They were going to grab that green package and the envelope and make it look as if I did it."

"Sure. Helmer was all set to turn a searchlight on the shack when he heard shots. Bonhag was going to shoot the two Boche and shove you outside. They figured you'd make your getaway all right."

O'Gara growled, hit the throttle with the heel of his palm. "And in case things went wrong, they had the D.H. handy for a quiet slide-out." He growled again. "I don't see why they took off and tried to shoot us down!"

Hank Brady juggled the Scarff mount, and let a short burst escape from the Lewis guns. Then he said, "This is the answer!"

He dug an arm into the depths of the pit, came up with the green-paper package and the important-looking brown envelope which O'Gara had seen in the shack.

"I snitched 'em!" explained Brady. "That's why I turned out the lights."

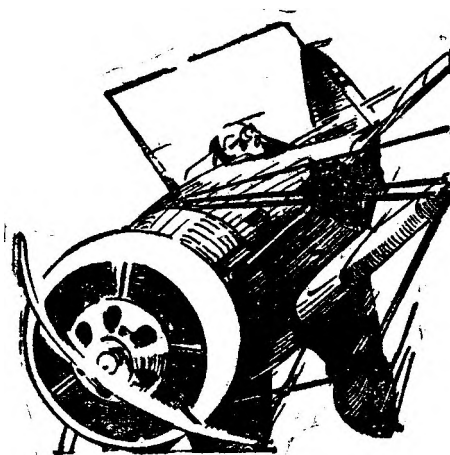
He pulled a bit of paper from the green package, passed it forward.

"Mazuma!" he yelled. "A thousand-buck bill. It's got plenty of brothers and sisters in this package. Most of it is French and English currency, though. It's jack the Boche were sending to pay their spies in France. And Bonhag and Helmer were trying to steal it. They had such a bad record they knew they had to have somebody to throw suspicion on, so they picked us."

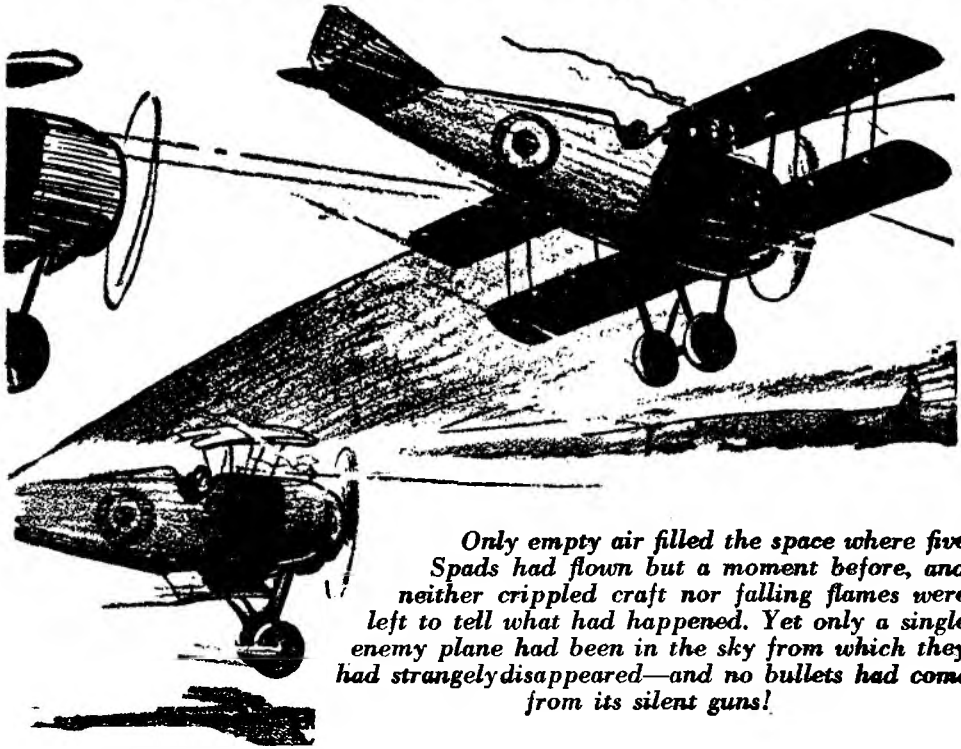
A Fokker D-7 had jockeyed up and under the Salmson's tail. Hank Brady wrenched the Lewis pair on the Scarff ring and beat the coaming twice with his clenched fist. O'Gara banked the ship sharply. Brady's guns stuttered. The Fokker burst into flame. There were no others in sight.

"And now," said Brady, "let's really head for home!"

"Not a bad idea," answered O'Gara. "But hang on to that package and the list of spies. We'll have to turn 'em over to the brass hats. But—" and he looked down at the bill that Brady had passed to him for inspection, "—there's no reason why we can't keep this for pin money!"



They formed a cordon against the flame-winged monoplane.



Only empty air filled the space where five Spads had flown but a moment before, and neither crippled craft nor falling flames were left to tell what had happened. Yet only a single enemy plane had been in the sky from which they had strangely disappeared—and no bullets had come from its silent guns!

Flight of Flame

By WALTER O'NEAL

PHIL ARMSTRONG'S keen eyes looked down at a precise formation of French Spads flying ten thousand feet below him. Through his special glasses he could see they were the latest models, and that they were equipped for bombing. He made a note upon the message pad he used for a log.

As aerial scout for the recently launched flying Intelligence Corps, Phil watched with canny eye the coming and going of all aircraft, but only in case of an exceptionally large enemy force did he touch the wireless key to flash a warning to headquarters.

The French Spads held his attention. They were going on a special mission. Whispered words from the French air forces had told of a plan perfected by

the Seventeenth Squadron that would give the Boche an unpleasant surprise. The attack was being launched. Phil nosed his own trim ship in the same direction. He would watch the Spads and see what their game was. The French had been vaguely mysterious. It was as much a part of Armstrong's duty to learn what the Allies were doing as to gauge the activities of the enemy.

The Spads swept across No-Man's land and entered German territory. The air was free of hostile aircraft. Armstrong swept the skies with his observer's glasses. It was not like the Boche to let a formation of that size cross without challenge. More than that, the French secret was not so dark as it might be. If the Americans knew it—

as they did—it was highly probable that the highly efficient Boche spy system had an inkling of the plan, also.

A frown roughened Armstrong's forehead. Something was wrong with the picture. Both the French and Americans knew that the Germans were planning some freak stunt. Whisperings from that side of the lines had told of the coming of *Hauptmann* Hans von Schlachtberg to the headquarters of the mighty von Richthofen circus. Before the war, Hans von Schlachtberg had been the outstanding industrial chemist of all Germany. Science was to aid the German in his drive to sweep the French and British from the skies. But thus far, he had made no sorties against the Americans.

Phil glanced at the Spads again. They were holding a level course, sweeping into the enemy hinterland with rare daring. Any moment might see them pounced upon by several squadrons of swift Fokkers, Albatrosses and Pfalz pursuit ships. A tingle ran down Armstrong's spine. The Boche were no fools. They were *permitting* those French to enter the back area—intentionally. Something intuitive told Phil he was to witness one of the war's greatest surprises since the first gas attack at Ypres.

Once more he scanned the heavens with his high-powered glasses. He caught a glimpse of a single ship scudding toward him. It was a monoplane. He thumbed his focusing screw and studied the strange craft more carefully. It was a type new to the western front. The wings were tapered like a bird's, but it was their color that held his attention. They were golden, slashed with crimson, giving the impression that the pilot flew on wings of flame.

Armstrong's nerves tightened. He knew that the beginning of a strange, bizarre drama was before him. He watched the flame-winged ship spin in a quick half-circle and take a position more than a thousand feet above the French. The Spads gave no sign of having seen the newcomer. Phil felt his muscles tense as he trained his glasses upon the Boche. He registered on the pilot's face. It was partly covered with goggles, but he saw a pointed Vandyke beard, shot with gray.

Hans von Schlachtberg! Phil had

been familiar with the work of the famous German chemist.

The scientist was flying slightly ahead of the French, holding the same line of flight. He made no attempt to attack. Occasionally his helmeted head looked over the edge of his cockpit. Like Armstrong, he was watching the progress of the French. But why, the American kept asking himself. Hans von Schlachtberg was no intelligence officer or pilot in a scouting formation.

Phil felt his heart pound. Something was going to happen, something utterly unsuspected and of unprecedented importance. He must miss nothing. His glasses were fixed on von Schlachtberg's ship, trying to glimpse anything that would give hint of the German's intention. Then his glance shifted down to the level at which the French Spads were flying.

They were gone! Only empty air filled the space where five trim planes had been flying. They had vanished completely!

Far below Phil saw several white streaks whizzing through space like falling stars. But that was all and the Spads might have flown off into a fourth dimension, for all Phil could see of them.

For a moment the American Intelligence scout stared, his jaw sagging. The unbelievable was before his eyes. Awe gripped him, but he shook it off.

He glanced at Hans von Schlachtberg's flame-winged monoplane. It had turned, and was flying toward a wooded section far to the right. Phil turned in that direction, but the German was traveling at a rate that would soon outdistance him. Armstrong kicked his rudder and swung around, then thrust the throttle forward to the limit and raced for Intelligence headquarters under full power.

“TELL it again—just as it happened, Armstrong.”

Major Devery, chief of the flying Intelligence for the sector, took up his pen to make the notes. His deeply lined face was drawn, and his gray eyes were weary. Phil Armstrong had recounted his experience with the flame-winged monoplane and *Hauptmann* Hans von Schlachtberg twice already. He flushed

slightly when the major asked for a third recountal.

"I'm trying to find if there was anything you forgot to tell," Devery said in a kindly voice. "It's all so important."

Phil nodded and again told his story. Major Devery looked at his notes before he spoke and shook his head slowly.

"I can't find a chink through which to peek," he finally said, smiling wearily, when he saw the puzzled expression on Armstrong's face.

"I mean," he explained, "that von Schlachtberg has left us no opening. The thing is perfect, satanically perfect."

"It wasn't gas—at least, not any gas that we know," Phil said. "There was no explosion. They didn't burn. I saw no smoke. First they were there, and then—nothing."

He took a deep inhalation from his cigarette. His mind had been groping for some key to the mystery. He, himself, had specialized in chemistry before his entrance into the Flying Corps. He had read some of the ponderous tomes written by Hans von Schlachtberg on the vagaries of organic chemistry.

"We've got to find out what he's using," he told the major. "We should get hold of some of von Schlachtberg's works, and they might give us some hint."

"By then the war'll be over," the major muttered. He paused as the telephone on his desk rang. Phil Armstrong could see the blood drain from his superior's cheeks as he listened to the hurried words that came over the wire. At last he returned the receiver to its hook and pushed back his chair.

"That call was from the commander of the British Fourth army. He wants me to come over. Something has happened that he can't understand. I've got a two-seater here. You pilot me."

A FEW minutes later, a Salmson two-seater was roaring through the sky, sweeping across the American sector into the territory occupied by the British Fourth army. Phil Armstrong had crossed this terrain many times and was familiar with the landmarks. He checked off the Fourth Army headquarters and the combined fields of the bombing and observation squad-

rons attached to the general's menage. Then he looked down on what had been the field of the pursuit groups. The tarmacs were bare. The hangars were gone. All he saw were little groups of ant-like beings—men, gathering in small knots.

"Moving?" Phil shouted to the major, gesturing to the field below.

"Land there," Devery shouted.

Armstrong descended, bringing the Salmson to a stop upon ground that looked as though it had been swept by some Cyclopean brush until nothing remained. As the major clambered from the rear cockpit, Colonel Bellingham, chief of the British flying Intelligence service, hurried to the Salmson's side. The usually red face of the British officer was the color of wood ashes, and the heavy lines on either side of his firm mouth were so deep they looked as though they penetrated the skin. His blue eyes were heavy and lusterless.

Phil Armstrong looked around. Squares of gray ash showed where the hangars had stood. On the tarmac were the outlines of airplanes. All that remained were the partially fused blocks of their motors and distorted machine guns.

"What are those white patches?" Major Devery asked in an awed voice, pointing to limelike deposits amid the gray ashes.

"Men—or rather, they were men," Colonel Bellingham grimly replied.

Men! Pilots who were seated in their cockpits ready to take off when death had swooped in its weirdest form! Hangars and barracks had also been visited by the lethal marauder. There, too, metal alone had survived, and only the heavier pieces retained a semblance of their original shape.

"What do the survivors say?" Major Devery asked.

"There are no survivors!" Colonel Bellingham answered.

Silently they walked from one patch of ashes to another. The officers and men from other squadrons eyed them and muttered among themselves. Fear gripped them—fear of the unknown. Before them were the results of a mysterious power which they could not understand. Death had held festival upon that landing field, and had left only ashes to tell of his visit.

"Didn't they see the fire from those two-seater fields?" Major Devery asked.

"They wouldn't. There are no flames," Phil Armstrong said before Colonel Bellingham had time to answer.

The pale face of the British staff officer flushed as he turned on the pilot. "What do you know about this?" he demanded.

"The only thing I'm sure about is who is responsible," the young man answered. "Hans von Schlachtberg—"

"Rot!" the colonel rumbled. "The Boche are bluffing. Von Richthofen let that story leak out, just to—"

"This doesn't look like bluff," Major Devery pointed to the ash-strewn landing field.

Only a few hours before, it had pulsed with life. Engines had roared, and pilots had laughingly called to one another before scrambling into their cubbies. Now nothing remained but gray powder, with here and there that limelike dust that once had been the bones of men.

The flush faded from Colonel Bellingham's face, and his blue eyes were heavy with unutterable fatigue. "That's right," he agreed, "but how could von Schlachtberg do this?"

"Our Chemical Warfare crowd is stumped," Devery answered. "Has yours had a look at this?"

"Their experts are here, but all they can do is shake their heads," Bellingham answered hopelessly. "I've cabled to the war office for—"

He paused as another American Salmon dropped down out of the sky and made a bumpy landing not far away. A junior Intelligence officer leaped from the rear pit and rushed to where Major Devery was standing. His youthful face was colorless, his eyes were wide with fear.

"What's up, Jones?" the major asked.

The young man handed his commander a sheet of paper. "That fell on the Ninety-Fourth's landing field, about an hour ago," he answered.

Devery glanced at the paper. A tide of blood crossed his cheek and then subsided. He handed the letter to Colonel Bellingham.

"I say, what cheek!" the Englishman exploded.

Phil Armstrong glanced at the message. His lips tightened as he read:

*"First the French, then the British.
You in a few days.*

VON SCHLACHTBERG."

SATAN, riding on wings of flame, had pronounced the doom of America's *corps élite*. The leading squadron of the American aerial force had been singled out for von Schlachtberg's next visitation. Phil Armstrong knew many of the pilots in that far-famed organization.

The young man had seen the ghastly efficiency of the German's methods. First was the utter dissipation of a full flight of French Spads while on the wing. On its heels came the destruction of a double squadron of British pursuit planes, including hangars, barracks and machine shops, with an accompanying loss of officers and men.

Phil Armstrong returned to Intelligence headquarters with Major Devery, there to meet officers whose names were famous wherever English is spoken. The menace that hung over Allied arms was the subject of discussion. The often repeated question of how to deal with this danger had only silence for its answer.

"There must be a way," a general rumbled. "Man never invented a weapon, without having some other man contrive an armor against it. Each acid has its neutralizing alkali, every poison its antidote."

Phil Armstrong bent to whisper to Major Devery, "May I have a day in Paris?" he asked.

"At this time, when—"

"I must have it now. I have a hunch—"

"Go ahead. We're all helpless, anyhow."

The General who spoke of acids and alkalis had given the young man a flash of inspiration. Only by the discovery of some neutralizing agent could von Schlachtberg's deadly scourge be made impotent, but first he must find what the scientist was using. He had seen enough to give him some faint idea, but he must turn to the works of Hans von Schlachtberg himself, to be certain.

Arriving at Le Bourget, he hurried to the national library and surprised the whiskered Frenchman in charge of the scientific department with a request for the works of Hans von Schlachtberg. Ponderous tomes were brought out for his inspection. It would take a week,

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at least, to go through them, and there was not time.

Then he recalled that benzol compounds were specialties in which von Schlachberg had showed his greatest skill. He returned to the volume whose cover was marked with the cabalistic device known as the benzol ring. At times, despair clutched him, but he read on. Night had come and was on the wane before he found a paragraph that brightened eyes grown weary by the complex black letter of the German text.

"*Das Phosobenzoid ist der am hoelische Schrecklichkeit das Man in Chemie kennt*," he read. "Phosobenzoid is the most hellish frightfulness known to chemistry."

HOURS later, Phil reported to a gray-faced commanding officer who had not slept for thirty-six hours.

"They've got the wind up from the Channel to the Alps," Devery told him. "Down at Chaumont, they're burping up the wires, trying to find the answer."

"I've found it," Armstrong told him.

"You've what?"

"Found the answer to Hans von Schlachberg's stunt."

"Then there must be some chemist in Paris the French have overlooked. They've been—who told you?"

"*Herr* Professor von Schlachberg himself," Phil answered. "Here it is." He handed Devery the chemical equation he had copied from the Schlachberg treatise on phosphoro-benzol compounds.

"That's Greek to me," Devery said. "What do you need?"

"Plenty of salt, some of that stuff that turns good brunettes into bad blondes, and two pilots who are not afraid of Satan when he comes after them on a pair of flames."

"Okay, son. Get your salt and peroxide, and I'll round up the pilots."

Phil Armstrong rushed his preparations. Herbert Martin and John Scanlon, two pilots from his old pursuit formation, reported to him, and the three called on the headquarters mechanical staff to assist. Meantime, the Chemical Warfare Service sent trucks roaring toward Intelligence Headquarters.

Armstrong then called his two pilots

(Continued on page 90)



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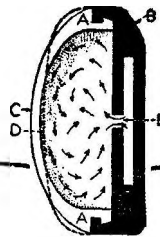
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(Continued from page 88)

to him, and together they outlined plans for battle.

"Remember—don't get below him, for any reason," was Phil's final warning. They took off with a roar, and gunned for the 94th's landing field. There they found pilots staring into the skies. They were not afraid of the massed squadrons of the Flying Circus, but the tales of the mysterious destruction of French and British formations had reached their ears, bringing anxiety.

"We're ready for him," Armstrong told the commander of the squadron, "and every O. P. on the Front is stargazing for his first appearance. Besides that, Major Devery has our crowd up on the twentieth floor, combing the ceiling for him."

The day dragged through, but no sign was seen of a racing monoplane whose wings were aflame. Phil Armstrong got his first night's sleep in days, but dawn saw him take to the skies with Herbert Martin and John Scanlon. All three planes were equipped with radio. Ear-phones were clamped in place beneath their helmets. They patrolled the sector between the 94th's airdrome and the Front.

The sun was plunging toward the west when a buzz in Armstrong's ear-phones made him stiffen in his cockpit. Scouts at the Front had sighted von Schachtberg's monoplane. The message came:

"Headed for Ninety-Fourth on ten thousand level."

Armstrong flashed a signal to his aids, and they darted to right and left, gunning their Spads to top speed. Spread out, they formed a cordon through which the German could not penetrate. Phil wirelessly a warning to the 94th, and through his field glasses saw the squadron take to the air. He cursed. Instead of beating an orderly retreat, the 94th was advancing.

Armstrong gunned his own Spad to greater speed. A signal came from Scanlon, off to the left. The pilot had sighted the flame-winged monoplane. Phil raised his glasses, and saw Hans von Schlachtberg racing toward them. Even while he watched, Armstrong saw Scanlon throw his tail into the air and dive, with throttle wide open. The Brownings on

(Continued on page 92)

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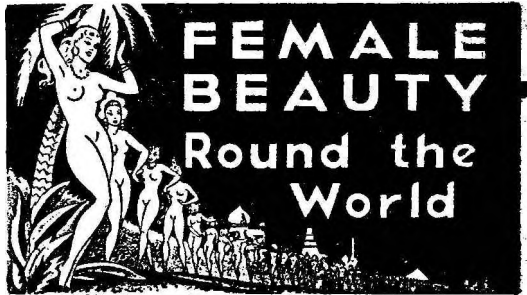
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(Continued from page 90)

his cowl were flashing as he hurled a steady stream of lead at the German. But as the American dived, von Schlachtberg came back with his stick. The monoplane zoomed with breathtaking speed, and before Armstrong could realize it, the German was above Scanlon.

A tiny object fell from the monoplane. Armstrong was nearing the German at a speed that whisked away the miles between them. He leveled his glasses on Scanlon's Spad. Suddenly it disappeared. Something white-hot shot toward the earth, flashing like a meteor. It was the engine block. Phil's cheeks paled.

He glanced to the right. Herb Martin was saucing his Spad, cutting in at an angle to intercept the German. Then Armstrong looked below. The 94th was roaring up from a lower level. Von Schlachtberg would be able to destroy this squadron of aces unless he was stopped within the next few minutes.

PHIL signaled to Martin and pointed to the empty void where Scanlon had been, but the pilot did not understand. Armstrong bent over his machine gun, which was loaded with explosive bullets. In using them, he was violating the rules of war, but any violation was justified in combat with Hans von Schlachtberg.

After a blast to test his guns' efficiency, Armstrong shoved down his nose. He would not be trapped like Scanlon. At the first sign of a zoom by the monoplane, he would haul back. His guns began to sputter, and he followed the smoking explosives as they raced through the air. He was firing at long range, but had attracted von Schlachtberg's attention.

Armstrong tossed his tail still higher, his guns going at top speed. The German nosed up to meet the charge. Seconds would see them change places and then the unseen death would fall from the red monoplane. The American whirled up into a loop. As he turned in a circle so sharp that he felt himself pressed deep into his cockpit, he twisted and looked down. Herb Martin had shot beneath the monoplane and had not had time to pull up. In another mo-

(Continued on page 94)

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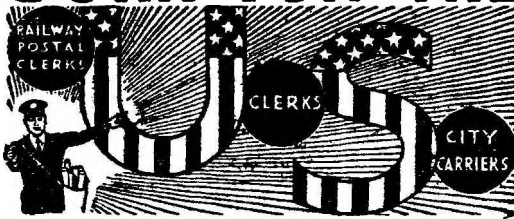


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(Continued from page 92)

ment, another speck would drop and Martin would be destroyed.

Armstrong jerked the wire holding a small container of salt water and peroxide. A silvery spray filled the air, tumbling down to where von Schlachtberg was circling. The German had released his own missile into the clouds.

Tense seconds seemed ages long. Then Martin's Spad shot upward, its Brownings clattering. A surge of elation went through Phil Armstrong. The German had unknowingly connived in his own destruction. His scientific book had shown the weakness in his armor, and his fate was foreshadowed.

Phil circled and clapped his glasses to his eyes. He could see von Schlachtberg staring over the edge of his cockpit, his mouth agape. His precious phosobenzoid had failed him. That white spray from Armstrong's container had neutralized what the German chemist had characterized as the most hellish chemical known to man. He was facing not one, but almost a score of American ships. Two, it was apparent, were equipped to meet him on his own terms. The 94th squadron was roaring up to meet him. Reason told the German these ships were not chemically equipped. He put down his nose and dived at them.

The elation which had surged through Phil Armstrong melted as he saw the German's plan. He must be brought down before he could destroy the American squadron.

Von Schlachtberg had seen his own fate, but he was not without valor. He would die inflicting the greatest possible punishment upon the Americans. He hurled his flame-winged monoplane at the head of the 94th formation. Its leader was advancing to meet von Schlachtberg at the highest speed his Spad could develop. The German would soon be in the midst of that gallant squadron, and Death again would have a festival.

Armstrong hurled himself at the monoplane. He crouched over his guns, ready to unleash them as soon as he was in range. He saw Martin throwing drag after drag at the German. The 94th pilots had tripped their weapons, and the air was gray with tracer, but Hans von Schlachtberg did not falter. He had determined to carry the squadron down

with him when he fell. Phil saw him turn to his bomb release.

Armstrong quickly judged the distance between the German and the 94th. His Spad would be unable to get between von Schlachtberg and the Americans. He made a swift decision. He tossed the tail of his Spad into the air and dropped like a meteor. His accelerated speed shot him toward earth at inestimable speed. Then he hauled back into a zoom. It gave von Schlachtberg the chance he wanted. The German was leaning over his edge, ready to drop his deadly egg.

Phil unleashed his guns. The explosive bullets were darting forward, straight for the monoplane. Instead of holding on the cockpit, Armstrong aimed at the little cluster of Phosobenzoid bombs beneath the pilot's seat. His shots were cutting the air just below them. He dropped his tail slightly.

The flame-colored wings of the monoplane seemed to melt in air. The body disappeared like a picture upon the screen when the projecting light is switched off. A moment before, Hans von Schlachtberg, internationally famous chemist, was menacing a squadron of American aces. Now he had ceased to exist!

A white-hot meteor plunged toward the earth—and that was all. It was the engine block, all that remained of the German ship. Not only had Phil Armstrong found a neutralizer for the phosobenzoid compound, but battle had exposed its greatest weakness. The man who took it aloft was helpless when a bullet ruptured the container holding his hellish compound.

An hour later, Phil Armstrong was on the tarmac, a general shaking one hand, while Major Devery grasped the other.

"Who gave you the idea, son?"

Phil flushed. "You did, sir, when you said that every acid has its alkali. Phosobenzoid burns with a colorless flame. That is why we saw nothing. It destroys before you can see what happens. But a mixture of common salt and peroxide renders phosobenzoid harmless. Von Schlachtberg knew that himself, and was fool enough to put it in his book."

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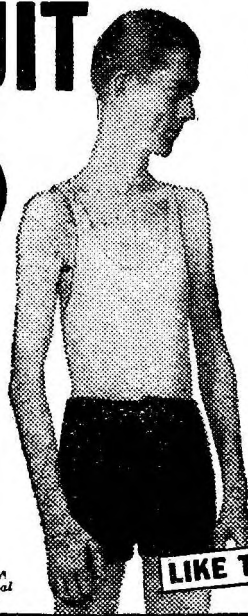
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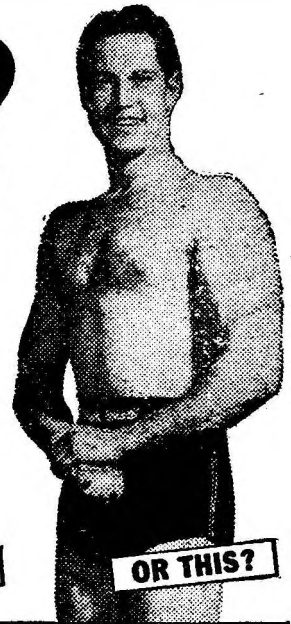


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ARE you ashamed to be seen in a bathing suit, because you're too skinny and scrawny-looking? Then here's wonderful news! Thousands of the skinniest, most rundown men and women have gained 10 to 25 pounds of firm flesh, naturally clear skin and glorious new pep, with this new scientific formula, Ironized Yeast.

Why it builds up so quick

Scientists have discovered that many are thin and rundown only because they don't get enough Vitamin B and iron in their daily food. Without these vital elements you may lack appetite and not get the most body-building good out of your food. Now you get these exact missing elements in these new Ironized Yeast tablets.

They're made from one of the richest sources of health-building Vitamin B—the special yeast used in making English ale. By a new, costly process this rich imported yeast is concentrated, taking 7 pounds of yeast to make just one pound of concentrate—thus making it many times more powerful in Vitamin B strength than ordinary yeast. Then 3 kinds of strength-building iron (organic, inorganic and hemoglobin iron) and pasteurized English ale yeast are added. Finally every batch of this Ironized Yeast is tested and retested biologically for its Vitamin B strength. This insures its full weight-building power.

No wonder these new easy-to-take little Iron-

ized Yeast tablets have helped thousands of the skinniest people who needed their vital elements, quickly to gain new normally attractive pounds, new pep and new popularity.

Try it without risking a cent

To make it easy for you to try Ironized Yeast, we do better than offer you a small sample package. We offer you a FULL SIZE package, and you don't risk a penny. For if with this first package you don't begin to eat better and get more benefit from your food—if you don't feel better, with more strength, pep and energy—if you are not convinced that Ironized Yeast will give you the normally attractive flesh you need—the price of this first package will be promptly refunded. So get Ironized Yeast tablets from your druggist today.

Only be sure you get genuine Ironized Yeast. So successful has this new formula been that you'll probably find many cheap "Iron and Yeast" substitutes in any drug store. Don't take substitutes.

Special offer!

To start thousands building up their health right away, we make this special offer. Purchase a package of Ironized Yeast tablets at once, cut out the seal on the box and mail it to us with a clipping of this paragraph. We will send you a fascinating new book on health, "New Facts About Your Body." Remember, results with the very first package—or money refunded. At all druggists. Ironized Yeast Co., Inc., Dept. 935, Atlanta, Ga.

DIDN'T DREAM HE COULD LEARN MUSIC WITHOUT A TEACHER



Surprised to Find He Could PLAY!

YES, just like thousands of others who thought his life was hard, this man got the surprise of music at home. And no wonder! Instead of months of tedious study and practice, he found himself actually playing real tunes in the very first few weeks!

But read his unsolicited letter for yourself:

"I didn't even dream that I could actually learn to play without a teacher, because I had always heard that it couldn't be done. I couldn't afford a teacher so I didn't think it would do me any harm to take your course.

"When I received the lessons I took the instantaneous note finder and struck the notes right off. You can imagine my surprise when after three or four weeks I found that I could actually play real tunes.

"Now, when I play for people they will hardly believe that I learned to play so well with just a correspondence course in so short a time. I am getting to the point where even the hardest music holds no terrors for me."

(Signed) *H. C. S., Calif.

Read How Thousands Have Learned to Play Their Favorite Instruments! Free Proof that You Can, Too

Which instrument would you like to play? The piano, violin, guitar, saxophone, accordion? Never mind if you don't know one note from another. Don't worry about "talent." And forget all you have ever heard about tedious study and practice. Here's proof you can learn quickly in spare time at home—without a teacher, at amazingly little cost.

It's easy as A-B-C. It's FUN! You learn to play by playing. Send at once for the Free Demonstration Lesson that shows HOW and the handsome illustrated booklet that gives complete information. Just mail the coupon. (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit).

U. S. SCHOOL of MUSIC
4345 Brunswick Bldg., New York, N. Y.

FORTIETH YEAR (Est. 1898)

FREE DEMONSTRATION LESSON

U. S. School of Music, 4345 Brunswick Bldg., N. Y. C.
Please send me Free Booklet and Demonstration Lesson. I would like to play instrument checked below. (Do you have instrument.....)

Piano	Saxophone	Banjo	Hawaiian Guitar
Guitar	Clarinet	Ukulele	Piano Accordion
Violin	Trumpet	Cello	Plain Accordion
Mandolin	Trombone	Coronet	Other Instrument

Name

Street

City State



New Plays Without Hesitation
A few months ago when I took up the Violin Course with you I knew nothing of the instrument. And today I can play any of the pieces in the lessons without the least hesitation.
*H. V. S. Alberta, Canada



*Actual pupils' names on request
Pictures posed by Professional models.

Makes Extra Money

I have completed your wonderful method for Guitars. For the past year I have been teaching and I have earned \$200, thanks to the U. S. School of Music.
*C. C., New Jersey



Easy to Understand
The manner in which the various lessons are explained is very helpful as well as interesting. It makes one feel that the explanation is being given in person.
*W. W., Florida



GEE... I'd sure like to have real **HE-MAN** muscles!

So would I, but it takes a long while

CHARLES ATLAS
Holder of the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" won in open competition in the only national and international contests held during the past 15 years

"Dunk!"

—says

CHARLES ATLAS

"I'll Prove in the first 7 days YOU can have a Body like Mine!"

No other Physical Instructor in the World has ever DARED to make the offer he makes in this announcement!

DON'T get the idea that it takes a lot of time and hard work for you to get smashing strength and powerful muscular development! And don't fool yourself into thinking that you need dumbbells, stretchers or any other such contraptions.

Both of these ideas are all bunk—and I have PROVED it. All I need is 7 days to prove what I can do for you! And I don't need any apparatus either. In fact, I have no sympathy with apparatus at all—don't believe in it. It is artificial—and it may strain your heart or other vital organs for life!

NATURAL Methods Are All I Need

On this page you will see an actual photo of how I look today. This picture has not been changed in any way. No retouches have been "painted on." This photograph is the camera's honest proof of what I have done for MY body. I myself am ready to prove what my secret of **Dynamic Tension** can do for yours!

To look at me now you wouldn't recognize me as the same man I used to be. Then I was a physical wreck, a 97-pound weakling—flat-chested, spindly legs, arms like pipe stems.

I was worried—and I had a right to be. I decided to study myself, to do something about my body. Then I made a discovery. I found a new way to build myself up. A way that was simple, natural, quick and sure! "Dynamic Tension" is what I called it. I put this secret to work. And in a short time I had the kind of body you see here—the body which has twice won the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

This Secret Has Helped Thousands

Thousands of other fellows now know this secret, too—and know from their own personal experience what **Dynamic Tension** has done for them. When they turned to me for advice, they were just as frail and bung as I once was. Now they are life-sized examples of what a man can and ought to be—with mighty energy, tireless endurance, and muscles that stand out like bridge-cables all over their bodies.

I have written an interesting booklet, filled with pictures, which tells my story—and theirs. I would like to send you a copy of it entirely free.

Let Me Send You My FREE BOOK

I'd like you to know what **Dynamic Tension** has done for me—what it has done for others—and what it can do for you! This little coupon will bring you my free book which tells all about it. There is no cost or obligation of any kind—and no one will call upon you.

I just want to put into your hands proof that I can do for you what I have done for so many thousands of others: give you broad powerful shoulders, biceps that bulge with smashing strength, a chest which stands out solid and muscular, and an evenly-developed body that will make others look like dwarfs next to you.

Will you gamble a stamp to win a body like mine? Then mail this coupon TODAY. **CHARLES ATLAS**, Dept. 495, 115 East 23rd St., New York.



This Sterling Silver Cup Being Given Away

This valuable cup stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base.

I will award it to my pupil who makes the most improvement in his development within the next three months.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 495

115 East 23rd St., New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of **Dynamic Tension** will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name

(Please print or write plainly)

Address

City State

FREE BOOK



Gamble a stamp today. Mail coupon for free copy of my new book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It shows you from actual photos how I have developed my pupils to my own perfectly balanced proportions. Where shall I send your copy? Write your name and address plainly on the coupon. Mail it today to me personally.