

12 COMPLETE STORIES

SEPTEMBER

Sky Aces

15¢



ACES ARE TABOO!

Dramatic Tale of a Kiwi Hero

By J. D. ROGERS, JR.

SKY-CANNON COUNTERFEIT

Gripping Warbird Novelet

By ARCH WHITEHOUSE

PLUS 10 SMASHING
AIR YARNS



TWELVE AIR ACTION STORIES — ALL COMPLETE

**SKY
ACES**

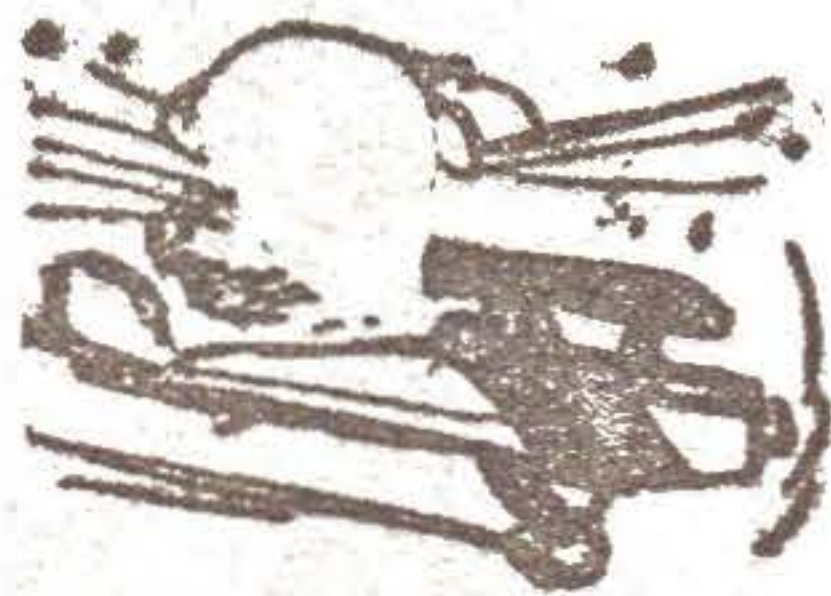
Volume 2

Number 2

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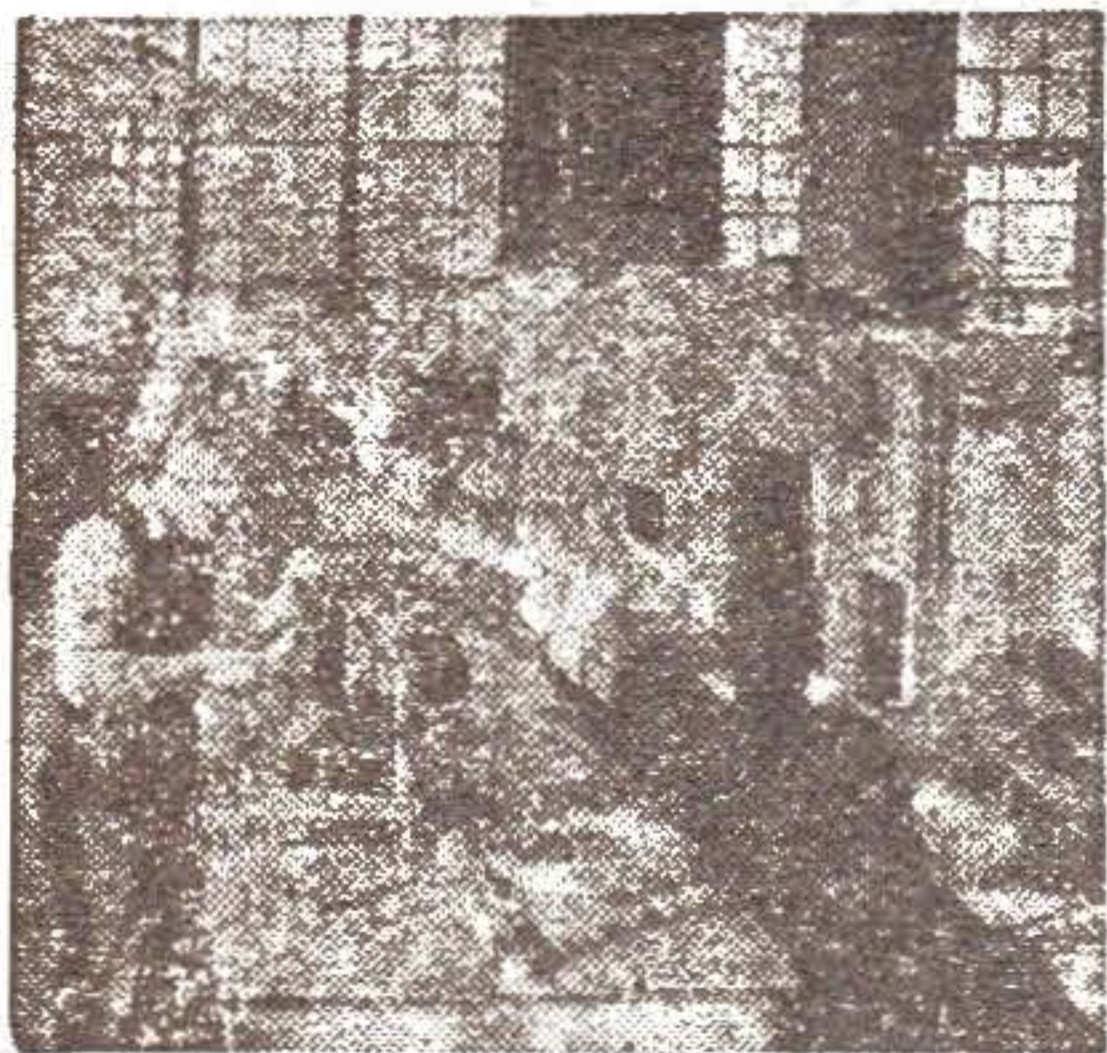
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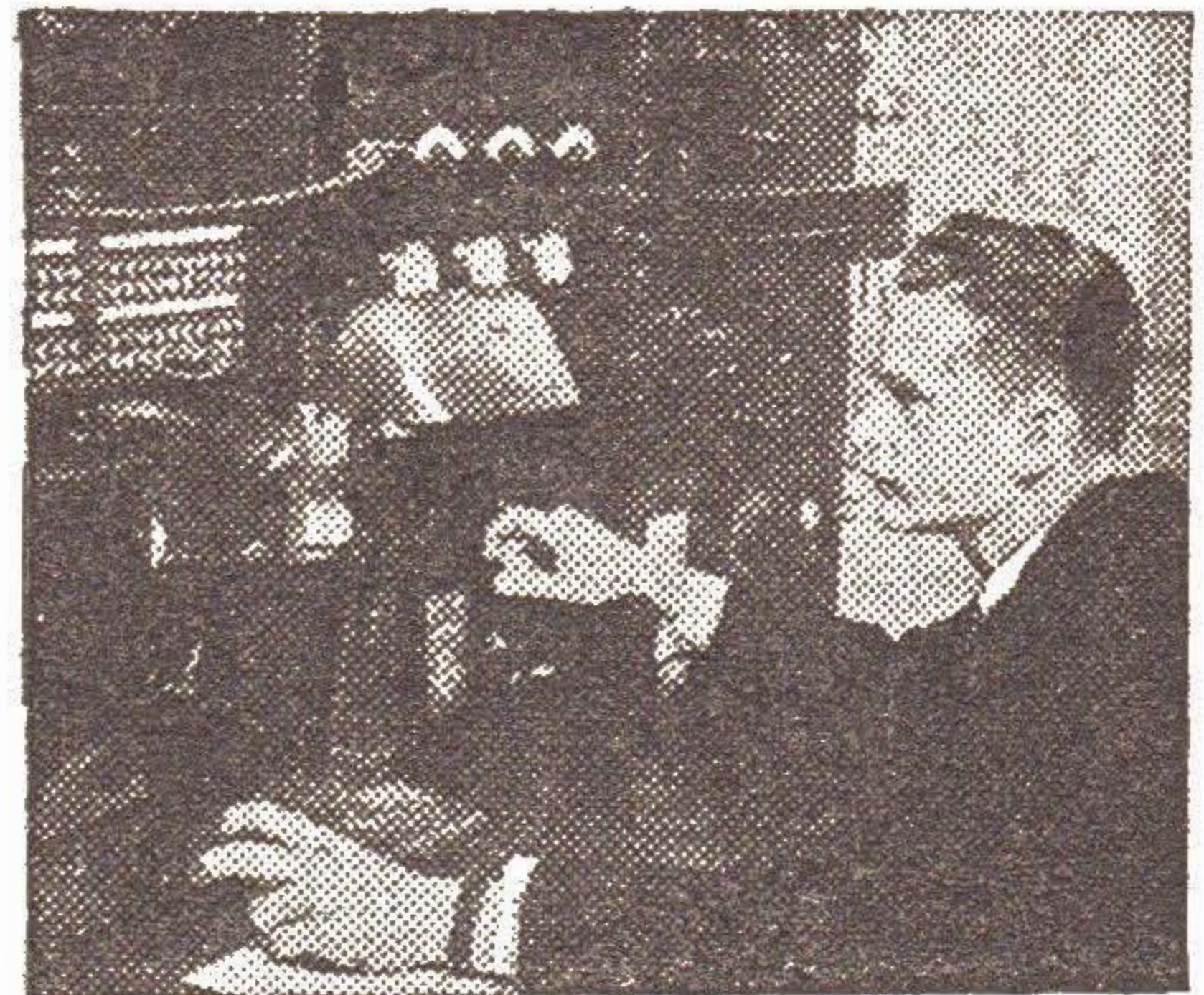
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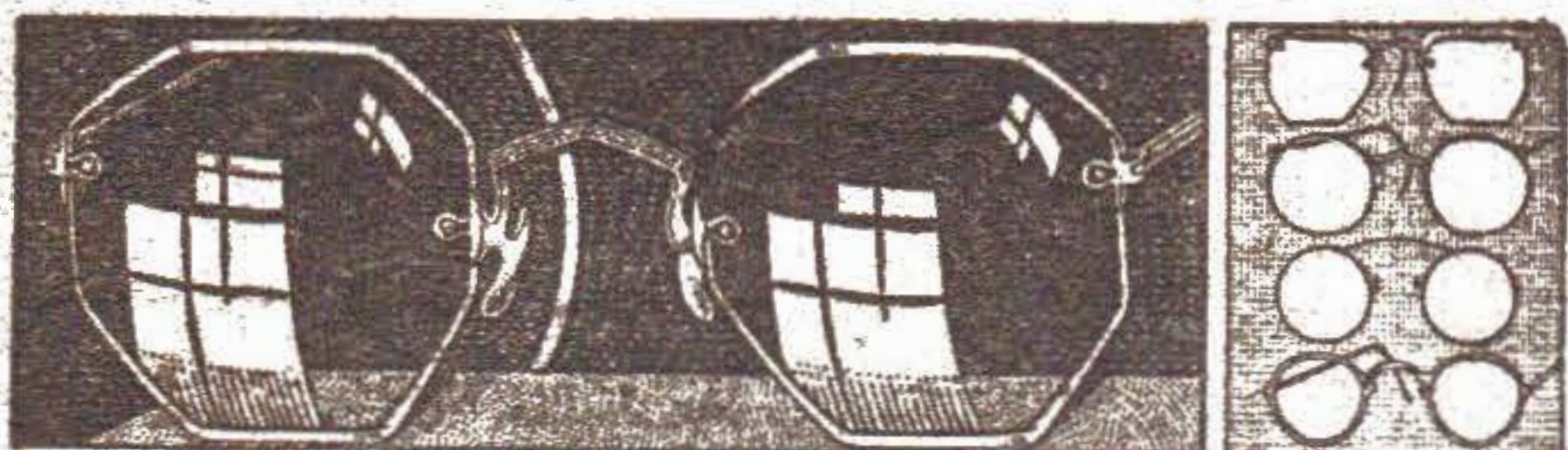
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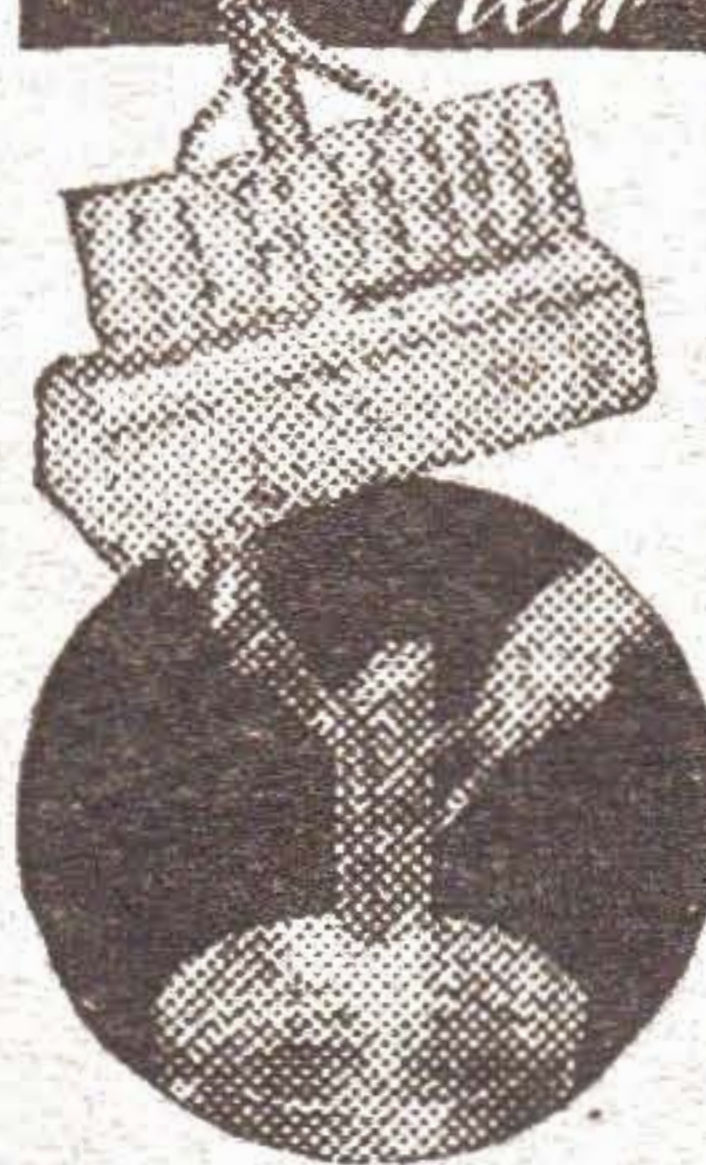
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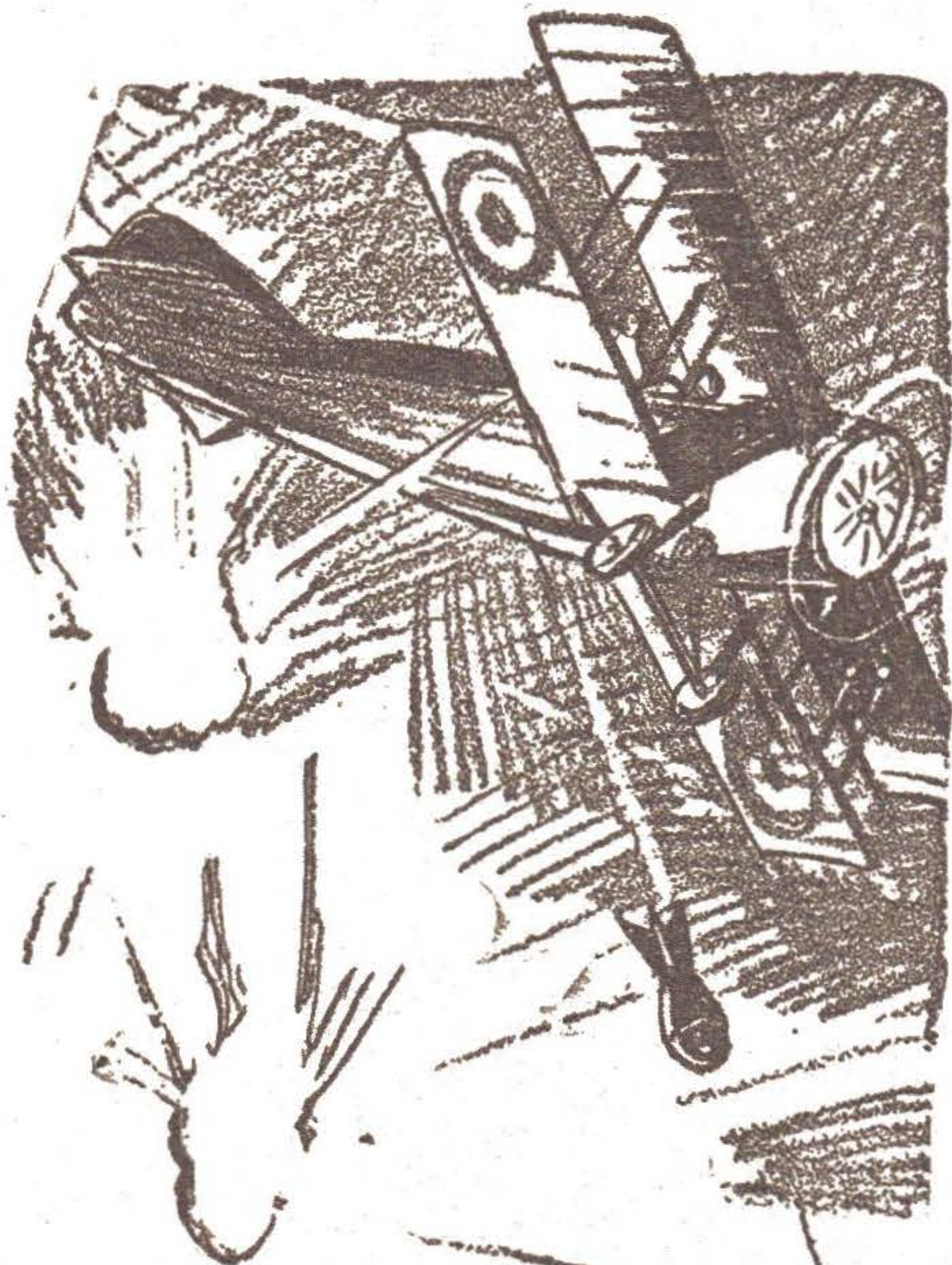
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Bill sent a bomb hurtling down at the monster while gun fire tore through his ship!



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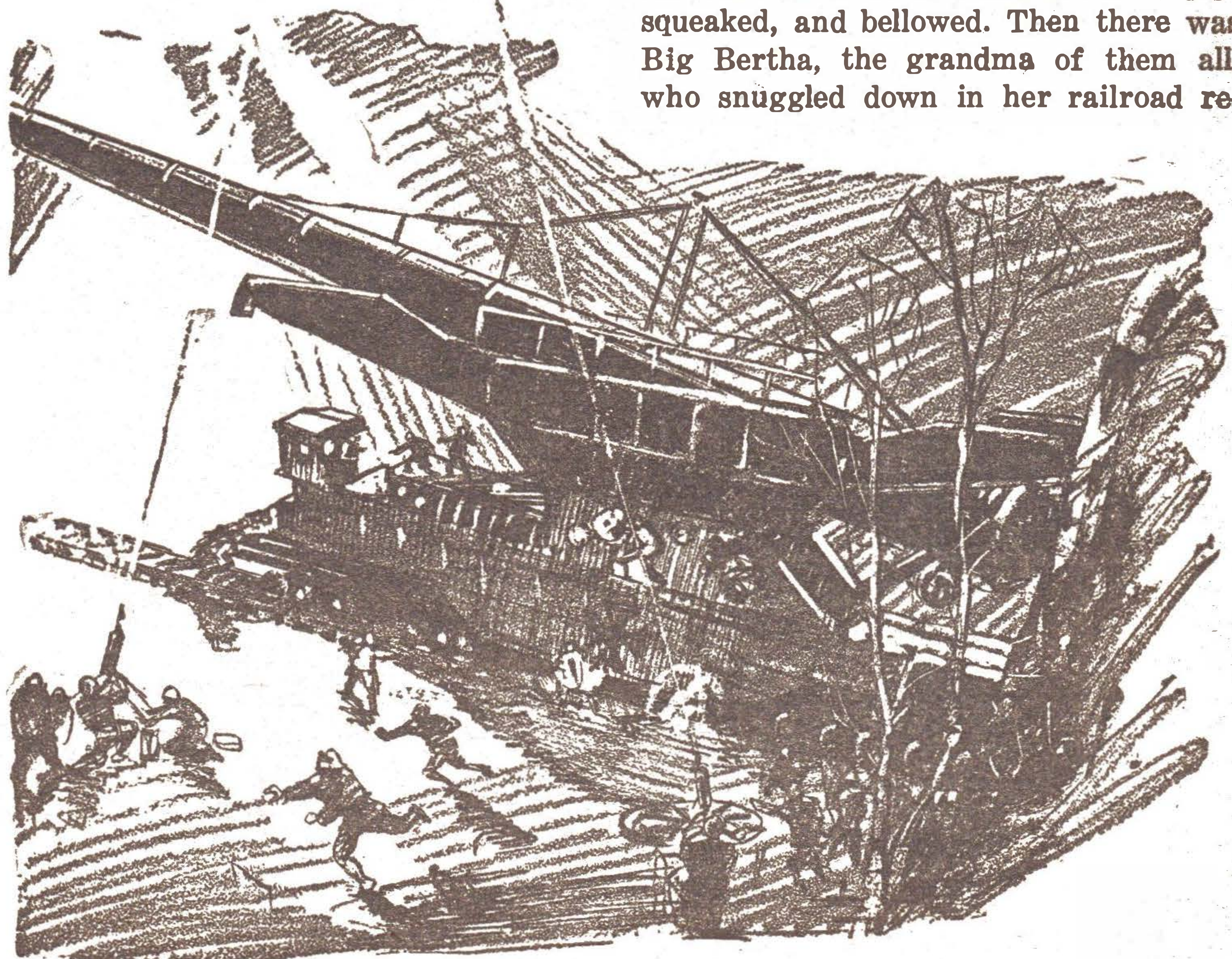
Author of "Hawker Hate," "Scourge of the Midnight Strafers," etc.

CHAPTER I

LUCKY LIMEY

TWO SOPWITH Salamanders, glistening with armored cockpits and new flying wires, winged their way across the great divide that was charged with blue steel bayonet points, rotting sandbags, snarling pill-boxes, belts of barbed wire, and the poignant hatred of war-weary men. Below blazed the star shells that searched for night prowlers. Tiny spurts of flame spat out, giving an unmistakable line to the battered trenches.

Field pieces, light artillery, 4-point-9's, 9-point-2's, Jack Johnsons, and all the rest of them snarled, growled, pip-squeaked, and bellowed. Then there was Big Bertha, the grandma of them all, who snuggled down in her railroad re-



Counterfeit

Night after night those giant aerial torpedoes screamed across the North Sea—like the fists of merciless Fate! Unerringly guided by the devilish skill of their unseen masters, they hurtled into the heart of London and blasted out death and destruction. The metropolis was strained to the breaking point. Then there came a new night and three more of those hellish messengers of doom. And it was then that the English broke—into a laugh!

★ ★ ★

doubt hidden away in a forest near Crepey. The old girl was loaded up once every three days with 246-pound shells. A few orders were gargled, sights adjusted, and a lanyard yanked. Seventy-six miles away a shell dropped, filling some narrow street in Paris with dusty masonry, the screams of women and children, and the death groans of those who had been battered down by this long-tentacled monster.

But it was not Big Bertha the two airmen in the Salamanders were seeking. Already her hangout had been spotted by the French, and they were working out a plan to spike her great throat. Big Bertha had given a lot of trouble in her short reign, but there was something much more important to seek tonight. A something that was eerie, mystifying, maddening, and nerve-shredding. A something that roared out on short stubby wings from somewhere in Belgium to carry great torpedoes of high explosive. A weird something that flew out from a steel runway and was guided by unseen hands to its destination. Not to Paris. Not to the self-secure headquarters of the British, American or French armies. Not to the great ammunition dumps that housed the shells, T.N.T., rifle ammunition, or other equipment that eventually was to back the

German Army up to the Rhine and make them squeal for an easy peace.

No, strangely enough, Wailing Winnie, as she was known to the few airmen who were put on her trail, was not directed at any point in France or Belgium. Every shell went screaming across the North Sea to fall with a roar of hate, a scream of a banshee, and a rattle of a giant ghost into some defenseless town in Great Britain. Wailing Winnie had struck North Foreland, Sandwich, Deal, Wingham, Barnham, and Sheerness. Each one had crept nearer and nearer the giant capital of the British Empire.

Somewhere near Ostend it lay, this aerie of the Wailing Winnie. But who knew where? They had worked hard on the problem. Radio experts were put on her trail, but a confusing number of other radio beams were always sprayed out at the same time that a Wailing Winnie was roaring over the North Sea. Remains of the aerial torpedoes, as the Intelligence men called them, were examined. But once they struck, there was little or nothing left to work on. The mangled mechanism was examined, but it revealed nothing. Where was the base that could direct such a monster to create death and destruction from such a distance and with such accuracy?

For a time the observers of the Royal

Action-Packed Yarn of the Independent Air Force

Air Force were put on Wailing Winnie's trail, but she was as elusive as the Scarlet Pimpernel. They photographed every inch of the back areas, but no sign of her could they obtain. Brave men risked the firing squad to find out where she lay. Patrol after patrol went out, but they always came back with the same story—not a sight of the base of this long-ranged old devil.

THEN, as always happened, they put the Independent Air Force on her trail. From then on, the screeching engine of destruction was a marked woman. Wailing Winnie had been having a great old time, but there is a limit to everything. For months the British had hushed her up. Every time Winnie struck, the newspapers carried stories of air raids. They told how the Zeppelins had come across, engines shut off, under a favorable wind. They told how two or three were brought down in flames in the North Sea. Fictitious heroes were created overnight, and John Bull sat back and chuckled something about an Englishman's home being his castle and that blood was thicker than German sausages.

But it could not last much longer. Wailing Winnie had to be stopped. And tonight these two Sopwith Salamanders were droning out their trails, searching for the great flash of flame that would indicate Wailing Winnie's redoubt. It was Wailing Winnie's night out, according to the schedule that had been carried out since she first made her debut three months before, and Bill Alcott—a Yank pilot who had been tossed out of a Camel squadron because he would not stay on the ground long enough to give the mechanics a chance to look at the points—and Merton Stewart—a quiet, queer Englishman who could not be induced to obey the orders of his superior officers—had what Alcott termed “a date with Winnie.”

These two—and you probably could not find a stranger duo anywhere else in the world—had been selected by Major Ian Webster to find this old gal who was raising such a commotion with pro-

prietors of East Coast seaside resorts, and with the Intelligence men of the B. E. F. They had also been ordered to cut her bonnet strings, slit her stays, or whatever they do to stop the gallivanting of supercharged aerial torpedoes.

Alcott, a blustering, cocksure American who accomplished his aims by sheer force, audacity, and blistering enthusiasm, had no use for the quiet, refined Englishman who completed his shows in a smooth, suave manner. Stewart never raised his voice. Nothing was important enough to his state of mind. Even the war was something of a quiet lark that one should tolerate and get over with as soon as possible. After that you could get back into civvies. He put up with Alcott in their patrols, simply because there was nothing else to do about it. He secretly liked the American as an airman, but had little use for a man who used so many strange words to express himself.

Alcott was leading the show as they banked about over the Jerry lines searching for Wailing Winnie and her base of operations. He turned, time after time, to see where his flying mate was. It was annoying to find the Englishman's Salamander a few feet away from his own tail. He flew so easily and smoothly. There was not a sloppy move in his aerial execution.

“Damn that guy, anyhow!” snarled Bill. “Wish they would put me with anybody but this Limey. Cripes! There's Canadians, Aussies, New Zealanders, and everything in this outfit, and yet they have to saddle me with a Britisher. Straight from Oxford, too.”

In the other Salamander, Stewart, fingering his joystick with the delicacy of an organ master, was reflecting on the shortcomings of his American teammate.

“Silly blighter, barging about like this. When is he going to see that flash? They've sent one Winnie out already. Must be pulling in the guide rails now. How long does it take him to spot it? We ought to pop off home and do the jolly old necessary.”

AT LAST Alcott straightened up in his seat. A long scarlet flame streaked out from a dull gray patch below them. There was Winnie! The glow of the catapulting explosive had brought out in bold relief the outline of the mushroom-shaped concrete redoubt from which two long steel rails jutted out and rested on a metal carriage that rolled on a half-moon of railroad track. Something had shot up the glistening steel guides and had gone wailing out into the night—a ghostly something that went “*Fizz!*” and was gone!

Within a few seconds Winnie would suddenly halt her wild screaming flight, hover a moment, suddenly nose down, and hurl herself at some dim blanket of human habitation, bury her gaunt snout into the earth, and then explode with a venomous growl that would rip out the foundations of great buildings. The great roar would echo and re-echo up and down the street. Great chunks of steel would blast into humble homes, snuffing out lives as a giant cone would snuff out a candle. Winnie was on the rampage again.

The American wagged his wings and attempted to shout back at Stewart. He could just distinguish the quiet Englishman nodding as if to say, “Certainly, I’ve seen it. What’s all the fuss about?”

“Aw, go to hell, you damned Sphinx!” growled the American. “I suppose you have a complete drawing of the device, the name of the guy who made it, and the color of his sister’s hair. You Limeys for luck!”

But while he was chewing the fat, the Englishman had been using his eyes. Overhead curled three batlike shadows. One suddenly dipped and crackled fire from its nostrils—dead into Bill’s fuselage.

Stewart raised an annoyed eyebrow, stroked his controls, and nosed his Salamander up into a wild zoom. There he steadied her on her prop. His Bowden control was pressed, sending out a burst of fire that caught the fanged Fokker full in the business office.

Bill just had time to realize what was happening when a flaming craft shot past him, missing his wing tip by inches. He turned to look for Stewart. There he was, back in place behind the American’s tail, as nonchalant as though nothing had happened. Actually, he was leaning back peering about for the other two.

Down they came from nowhere. These Salamanders must not get back. They had seen Wailing Winnie, and in gazing upon her had signed their death warrants. Bill still whipped and curled about, hoping to get a shot at something, but his wild flying only made him an easier target. Another Fokker streamed down out of the haze and fired for the black spot between Bill’s exhaust flames. But the Englishman behind curled over under the Jerry’s blind spot and again nosed up to send a burst of steel-jacketed lead into the vitals of the diving Boche. A dead hand gripped the stick now, and the Fokker nosed over into a wild death dive and disappeared completely.

Bill swore. The lucky Limey again! Well, there was nothing else to do but get back home and betray Wailing Winnie.

They had little trouble in racing through the barrage of Jerry Archie and flaming onions. On and on they raced through the Stygian darkness to their airdrome a few miles away. The ground crew put out three petrol tins of flaming oil-soaked waste for them to land by. There were no fancy landing lights in the Independence Air Force.

CHAPTER II

THE REPORT



ALCOTT was the first out of his ship when they had pulled the Salamanders up to the cab-rank. Like a shot he raced for the orderly room, almost knocked down the creaking door and bowled over the sleepy-eyed major, who was strug-

gling up from his maps to greet the returning flyers.

"We got her, major!" bellowed Alcott, ripping off his helmet.

"You've got who?" snapped the Squadron Commander. "What are you talking about?"

"Wailing Winnie! The base of the Jerry aerial torpedoes!" gurgled Bill.

"You've—you've found the device that's shelling all around London?"

"Yes, sir. That is, Stewart and I flashed her tonight. He got two Fokkers, too!"

"Where's Stewart?" demanded Webster, staring past Bill to the still open door. "Damn it, where is the man?"

"I don't know, sir. We landed and taxied up to the hangar together. I came straight on here. Thought he was following."

"Go out and find him. Bring him in here quickly!"

Bill tore out again like a wild, excited school boy. Back to the hanger he raced, tripping over a guy wire on the way and swearing a blue streak. He found the Englishman, one leg cocked over the side of his cockpit, leaning back and having a quiet chat with a mechanic about a cricket match they had both attended at Lords the year before the war.

"Holy jumpin' petcocks!" bellowed Bill. "The major's storming up and down his castle, threatening to hamstring you, and here you are talking about cricket! What the devil's the matter with you, anyway?"

"What does the major want?" inquired Stewart, quietly.

"What does the major want?" almost screamed Bill. "Holy Moses, what a guy! You take the biscuit, you do. He wants to find out about Wailing Winnie, you sap. Wailing Winnie, the aerial torpedo we saw in action tonight. Everybody in France and England wants to know about it, and here you are talking cricket. Where do you think you are—in Piccadilly Circus?"

"Thought you could tell him all about it. You were in there, weren't you? What more could I tell him? Let me

alone. Groggings here doesn't think much of Sutcliffe's batting in the test matches, and I'm trying to convince him he's wrong. Flutter off and tell the jolly old major the story yourself. You know more about it, anyway. Now, as I was saying, Groggings, old egg—"

"Never mind Mr. Groggings and your blasted cricket, Stewart," bawled a voice behind Alcott. "You just get inside there and make out your report. The cricket can wait." The major had overheard their little conversation.

"Dash it all, don't let's get all egg-bound about this thing. We know where the blithering old gal hangs out. What more do you want?" returned Stewart, pulling himself out of the cockpit with little enthusiasm.

"You get in there, Stewart, and make out that report at once," snapped Major Webster again. "G. H. Q. has been barking for this information for weeks."

"Yes, and they'll probably drop it down a drain when they do get it. What's it worth, anyhow?" complained the Englishman. "Who's going to stop them from barging about with it, now we have found where they keep the bally thing?"

"Who?" raged the major. "Why, *you* are! You're the only two who actually know where it is. It's up to you two to bung it up."

"Bung it up!" fumed the Limey pilot. "We two are to spike the blinking old wailer? What do you think we are—ash cans with the bottoms kicked in? What's the matter with the artillery?"

"Lieutenant Stewart! That's enough. You are here to take orders—and obey them. Go in and make out your report, and no more unnecessary remarks," closed the major, stalking off to his rat-hole, a queer grin stealing across his ruddy face.

"**D**ID you hear what he said, Alcott?" demanded Stewart as they trooped into the Recording Office. "We are supposed to go back and take the sting out of Wailing Winnie. What's the matter with the artillery?"

"Great!" agreed Bill. "All the artili-

lery wants is a gun that will fire about forty miles. Do you know where it was we saw Wailing Winnie?"

"Where it was? Er—no. I sort of left it up to you. Why, where was it?" inquired Stewart, blandly.

"It was outside Damme, just north of Bruges. That's where it was."

"Do you mean to tell me we were that far over?" replied the Englishman. "It just shows you what blokes we are. Forty miles over in a Salamander. We're balmy! Ought to pack up the whole B. E. F. and go home and defend Blighty. Let the French take care of their own troubles."

"There's your whole story in a nutshell," roared Bill, snapping up from his report sheet. "You know nothing about co-operation. You'll never win this damned war in fifty years. No co-operation."

"Win the war? Who wants to win the war?" demanded Stewart half-amazed. "We haven't won a war at any time, as far as I can make out, but we seem to be here just the same. Besides," he continued with a sly grin, "we have left it to you Yanks to win. You have had a lot to say about it ever since you came over, now's your chance to do something."

That brought Bill out beautifully.

"You bet we'll win the war. Just you wait and see," he roared.

"Well, we've been waiting for three years," returned Stewart quietly. "We had the same thing from the Canadians in 1915. Then the Australians gave us the old story when they came up from Gallipoli. The war's still going on, old thing."

"Yeah? Well, here's one Yank who's gonna do his bit toward winning it, and I'll start by getting Wailing Winnie."

"Fine. But be sure to take your own newspapermen along and at least three newsreel chaps so that the folks back home will know you *are* winning the war," smiled Stewart artfully.

"That's all right. I'll admit we are great advertisers. We have to be to offset all the running-down we get in Europe. But I'll get Wailing Winnie, and

you'll be on hand to see the fun whether you like it or not," warned Alcott.

"Have you ordered your medals yet?" went on the taunting Limey.

"The hell with the medals! I'll bring Wailing Winnie's recoil chamber back, tie it around your neck and drop you in the Yser. We go tomorrow night, if the major will let us," snapped the American.

"Lovely! If the major will let *us*. Don't worry, he'll let *you*, William, but don't try to drag me into it. I don't mind doing my daily stint, but when it comes to attempting to kidnap Wailing Winnie, leave me out of it. I want to live long enough to be pensioned off some day."

"Look here, Stewart. Do you mean to say that you wouldn't go on this trip if they asked you?" demanded Bill.

"Wouldn't go? Of course I'd go. But I certainly would not go begging for the job. I'm no hero."

"Look here. What the hell did you get those two medals for?"

Stewart glanced down at the two dirty ribbons that were stitched beneath his wings.

"Those? Oh, you know how these things come. Something happens. Somebody sees you somewhere around. Somebody has to get the tin-ware. I clicked twice. I didn't go after them. Probably the lads who should have had them are rotting in a soldier's grave somewhere. I'll tell you straight, Alcott, I'm out here to get through with all that belongs to me. If you are out pot-hunting, go ahead and help yourself, but don't drag me into it just to prove that you are out to win the war. Frankly, I've been here since 1914, and from now on, I'm out to die of old age."

Alcott's face changed as the Englishman made this statement. He went back to his report for a few minutes, and then suddenly opened the conversation again.

"All right, Stewart. I think I understand your attitude. Perhaps I would feel the same if I had been out here that long. Still, I think that while I'm here, I might as well be a good soldier."

"Good soldiers never volunteer for anything," broke in Stewart.

"I'm going to volunteer to go and get Wailing Winnie, nevertheless. I'll go alone, too. You needn't bother to chip in at all."

"Stout fellow! Best of luck," responded the Englishman without looking up from his report.

CHAPTER III

ABODE OF DOOM



THE report on the position of Wailing Winnie, as presented in the returns of Alcott and Stewart, created a stir in G. H. Q. Wing Commanders from the whole brigade were called in, and the Red Tabs went into a prolonged huddle. Suggestions to have every bombing plane on the Front go over and blast the daylight out of her were brought up and cried down. It was icily observed that no one but these two rattle-brained Independent Air Force pilots had seen the redoubt. Early morning patrols could confirm nothing.

So Alcott and Stewart were advised late that afternoon, following their night patrol, that they had been given the job of silencing Wailing Winnie. Quite a job, if you asked anyone in those days.

Bill Alcott gloated over his prize. He realized that they had selected a stiff proposition, but he gloried in planning the work. Stewart, on the other hand, accepted in the same mien he would have displayed had he been asked to have another cocktail. It was just another day in the war for him.

"Well, Mr. Limey. You see you have to go, anyway, and you might as well like it," Bill taunted. "Too bad, but to be frank, I'd rather have anyone but you go with me, since you bellyached about it so much last night."

"Don't worry, Alcott, old plum. I'll be there—somehow. I'd rather be punting the Thames, of course, but if we have to go, we might as well make the best

of it. Don't worry, I'll be on your tail, knocking naughty Jerries about if they dare look at little Willie, the Wailing Winnie Walloper."

Somehow, Alcott knew, down inside him, that he would rather have this queer Englishman along than any Yank pilot in France.

That afternoon they supervised the preparing of the Salamanders for the night patrol in which they hoped to blast Wailing Winnie out of the small Foret de Blange near Damme. Between them they had checked back on their maps and decided that this was the spot where the longrange weapon was hidden.

Actually they were only partly right, for the Germans had put in two other concrete redoubts of the same shape and size. Their big brass shells were fired a few seconds before a Wailing Winnie was actually released. This was done to offset the rangefinders and sound-range instruments of the Allies. It was one of these fake redoubts that the two airmen had spotted, but they were near enough to make it interesting. The real redoubt was situated between them, facing the railroad track that curved in a half-circle and provided an easy track for the forward section of the great catapult.

Alcott was not quite certain just what he intended to do about putting Wailing Winnie's dive out of commission. But like all airmen, the first thing he thought about was bombs. He had decided on four forty-pounders fitted with direct-action fuses for doing as much damage to the redoubt and its intricate mechanism as possible.

"If these don't do the trick, Cuthbert," growled Alcott as he withdrew the safety pins from the nose-caps, "we'll go back again."

"Can't be bothered," drawled Stewart. "I expect you to finish the job with the first egg. If you don't, how are you going to explain it to the historians?"

"Aw, shut up," growled Bill.

THE major bounced around to inspect the ships before daylight blinked out. He went over the plans again and ex-

THE two Salamanders were on the tarmac, ready for the great adventure. Darkness began to fall fast. The three petrol tin flares were set out and the Salamanders bellowed into their warm-up. Stewart climbed in, buttoning his short flying coat, and adjusting his helmet and goggles.

Alcott was ready, and he moved out to race down the narrow runway toward the two take-off limit fares. He waved to the Englishman, who returned it with little enthusiasm, and drawing back his cold throttle bar, he hurled his Salamander into the sky ahead. But Stewart was after him like a whippet in quest of the mechanical rabbit, and just as close. Alcott glanced back and smiled to himself. He knew the Englishman would be there as long as he had gas and a hand left to guide the ship. It was a comfortable feeling.

Ten minutes later they were at 10,000 feet and roaring across the line. Below flickered the two parapetted lines of chief resistance, from which sparkled and blazed the venom of men's hatred. Behind these, on both sides, spat the blunt muzzles of howitzers that hurled steel cylinders for miles to batter buildings and bodies into shapeless heaps. Weary-eyed men ducked, dodged, and cringed under the torrent of steel and pounding concussion. Guns in pill-boxes chattered and screamed in frenzy. Dark figures crept across gutted fields and hurled black objects that cranged and crashed. And above all this organized madness rode the two raiders of the night, bent for a call on Wailing Winnie.

The wood of Foret de Blange lay behind the noted salient that pointed directly at the Channel ports. It was miles from the actual Front, but Bill and Stewart had to go even farther off their intended course to carry out their plans. They crossed the line at Bixschoote and then nosed over dead north, following the glistening ribbons of railway lines that ran from Cortemarck to Bruges.

All went well until they reached Lophein where they received the first intimation that the Jerry squadrons had been advised of their coming. A heavy Archie

barrage caught them, and for five insane minutes they were buffeted around in a storm of high explosive, shrapnel, and concussion. But Stewart still held his position a few feet behind Bill's tail.

On they roared, weaving and ducking through the blinding searchlight defenses that flanged out from the outskirts of Bruges. Another curtain of flaming onions and whining chunks of steel attempted to block them off, so Bill curled around and dodged to the right, intending to swing around the old town and work himself into a position from which he could attack the redoubt from the north side of the wood.

They raced away, and suddenly the battery of lancing searchlight beams was snuffed out. A smoke screen billowed out and started rolling across the right-hand corner of the wood. A battery of smoke pots was attempting to make the wood and the secret redoubt invisible.

"To hell with them! I'm going down through it," snarled Bill.

Stewart raised a startled eyebrow as he watched the mad American nose down like a blazing bolt straight for the pungent black blanket below. Down went his stick, and in ten seconds the Englishman was in his place again.

Grump! Grump! Grump! roared the Jerry A-A guns.

"Go to the devil!" grinned Alcott, searching for the old girl and her scarlet nosepiece.

"What a lovely night," observed the Englishman, realizing that they were in for it now. "Alcott must be celebrating his Fourth of July—or something equally as potty."

A flame shot out from a far corner of the blanket. Alcott spotted it like an eagle. Over went his stick, and his hand searched for the bomb toggles.

"Silly ass!" growled Stewart. "He's potting the blind, I'll bet a quid."

Down went the American through the stifling cloud of smoke. Something came up through the sooty haze. His stick came back into his stomach, and a toggle rasped in its guide. Two forty-pounders went out of the rack.

They curled around to level out when

the *Ber-o-o-m!* went up from below. Machine guns clattered, spat, and slung lead for all they were worth. Stewart hung onto his eggs for a while. Still he kept his position. Bill screwed his ship over on one wing tip and went after the redoubt again. Through the clouds of smoke he went like a madman. His eyes streamed. He choked from the pungent odor of the smoke screen, but he kept his ship at it until the colorless mass of steel, concrete and camouflage came up to him again.

Scrawneh! went the toggles, and out went the two remaining yellow eggs. This time Stewart followed his man to the letter. He, too, let go with his two forty-pounders.

Ber-o-o-m! Ber-o-o-m! growled the bombs below.

Concrete, steel, ammunition sheds and rotting camouflage went up in a garish flash of flame. Stewart leaned back to observe the effect. He shook his head. They had been fooled. This was not Wailing Winnie, but just an ordinary Jack Johnson. Damn fool, that man, Alcott! He turned back to snarl at him, but the other Salamander was nowhere in sight.

The Englishman stared ahead, unbelieving. He careened about all over the sky, searching for the American. Two Fokkers screamed out from above, but the calm Stewart took no notice of them. Back and forth he raced, searching and swearing.

FOR ten minutes he raced through a hail of lead, steel, and fire. He must find that crazy American somewhere. He could not go back without him. What the devil had happened to him, anyway? Had he gone down to get a piece of that recoil chamber, as he had threatened? But the thought was mad. Anything as big as that would weigh a ton. Must be as big as a bank vault.

Ghostly aircraft dove on him from above, riddling his wings to shreds. Spandaus below splashed about his armored seat and played a mad tune. Still he kept at it, hardly a hundred feet off the ground.

Suddenly something appeared ahead of him like a gigantic steel tongue of a

serpent—two glistening rails that fanged out of a mushroom-shaped redoubt—two talons that rested on a steel railroad car that ran on a section of curved track. Like a flash he threw his ship over on her wing tip, reversed his controls, and kept his nose up by the judicious use of top rudder. He stared down again and took in the full details of Wailing Winnie's abode of boom. So this was the device that launched the winged missiles on their long flights to destroy London.

"Good Lord! What a man-sized device," Stewart whispered to himself.

Back he went for the spot, as near as he could gauge it. The great guides snarled out again above the layer of the smoke screen. That was enough to work on. He let his last two bombs go. But even at that close range, he misjudged the distance. He could not know that the guides measured nearly 150 feet, and at the moment they were at a low angle for loading. His bombs fell just short of the concrete redoubt housing the great and intricate mechanism that guided the Wailing Winnies on their mad flights.

Ber-o-o-m! Ber-o-o-m!

"Where the devil is that Yank?" the Englishman snapped. "I can't stay up here all night waiting for him."

It was getting hotter by the minute. The two Fokkers had discovered him again and were diving on him from two sides, and it took all his delicacy of handling to keep out of their fire.

No use. He had to beat it. It was senseless to stay there. Besides, Alcott might have gone back in his eagerness to tell of their success. Over went his stick, and he raced away through the clouds of smoke and gathering mist to make for the coastline. From there he could follow the shore from Ostend to Dunkirk. It was a good hour's run back to his airdrome, and he settled back for the tiresome flight. Of course, the major would blame him if Alcott did not get back, but what of it? He had been blamed for worse things than that. He took it all philosophically.

The flares were out when he came to the field. With his last few ounces of petrol he taxied up to the hangar.

"Where's Alcott?" demanded the major as the Englishman slid over the side.

"Isn't he back?" returned Stewart.

"No, he isn't. What happened to him?" roared the Squadron Commander.

"I don't know. I lost him in the smoke screen they put up over the guns when we got there. Thought he had barged off ahead of me."

"Well, he isn't here damn it! What happened, anyway?"

"Don't know for certain. Alcott let his bombs go on a blind, I think. They have a couple of Jack Johnsons there, too, and he fell for the wrong flash. I nearly ran into Winnie's tin trail looking for him. And as I had a couple left, I let them go. Couldn't see what happened. The damn thing was as big as a pyramid, and had long steel guides sticking out that rested on a railroadcar affair."

"Probably a blind, too," snorted Major Webster. "Too bad that Yank had to go, though."

CHAPTER IV

HERR DOKTOR ALCOTT



TO RETURN to Alcott, who had so suddenly disappeared we must go back to the point where he had let his last two bombs slide out of their

racks. Instinctively, as he felt their concussion, he knew he had been fooled. He had wasted his bombs on a blind gun. He swore and ranted within himself. Then his controls went loggy. The main spars shivered and the ship wobbled like a winged grouse.

"What the—" snapped the American, fighting the stick.

But it was no use. The Salamander was through. Bullets rattled all about his armored seat. More blasted their way through the cowling, and battered the vitals of the engine. The prop stopped cold and the ship gave up the ghost completely.

"Oh, well," he mused, setting himself

for a crash, a hospital bed, and a probable spell in a Jerry prison—if he was lucky. "Guess I'm through hunting Wailing Winnie. Old Stewart can have her all to himself now."

The ship found her gliding angle and nosed down through the smoke and haze. Bill sought a suitable landing spot and then began to think quickly. If he got down without breaking any limbs, he might be able to get back. He spoke German fluently, having put in two years at Heidelberg after graduating from Princeton. With a bit of luck, he still might be able to make his way back through the lines and thus win another chance at Wailing Winnie.

Tree-tops scraped his wheels. One wing clipped the foliage and almost upset the apple-cart. Ahead lay a narrow strip of level turf. Down went the nose of the Salamander, and with much fish-tailing, the American brought his ship to a halt at the far end.

Behind him, fully a mile or two away, the world was still going mad. Planes screamed overhead, guns barked and M. G. muzzles blazed out their wild chorus.

For a moment he stared at his winged ship. Then, without further ado, he drew a flare from his cockpit, turned on a pet-cock under the instrument board, and ignited the fuse. In a few minutes the beautiful Salamander was a shapeless cinder, and Bill Alcott was a quarter of a mile away.

HERR DOKTOR von Rausenhardt, the noted German physicist of the Krupp Works, strolled back to his comfortable shack, half a mile away from the grim redoubt that housed the mechanism controlling the activities of Wailing Winnie, his brainchild of more than ten years' hard work. He had come up earlier in the evening to go over the great device and arrange for new loading of the aerial torpedoes that were to be poured on London. He had been in the pit following the raid made by the two Salamander pilots. One bomb had fallen dangerously close to the great turntable that carried the gaunt guides.

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But no serious damage had been done.

"Those damned airmen; cheeky swine to take the chance," he growled to himself as he drew the blind and turned on an electric lamp. "Oh, well," he continued, "we would probably try the same thing. Poor devils on the other side wonder what the device is like, of course."

He laughed a self-satisfied chuckle and went to the table on which he had been working out a new formula of explosive for the aerial torpedoes that were to be released the next day. He had settled himself to his figures and curves when a dull rap sounded on the door. He frowned as he turned in his seat.

"Come in," he grunted.

A moment later he went a sickly pearl gray. A khaki-clad soldier stepped into the room. A gun flashed in his hand.

"*Gott!*" gasped the Jerry professor. "Who are you?" This was the first time he had come face to face with an enemy. It was quite different from building great machines that would destroy cities a hundred miles away.

"Keep your mouth shut," snapped Alcott in almost perfect German.

The professor stared at the intruder amazed. Bill in turn stared at the professor. They sized one another up quickly and Alcott noted with satisfaction that the man was about his build, height, and coloring. He grinned as his brain snapped into action.

"Who are you?" demanded the American.

"I'm *Doktor* von Rausenhardt, physicist to the Krupp Works."

"You working on that thing out there?" came back Bill, jerking a thumb over his shoulder.

"I'm the ballistic engineer on the weapon. I supervise the loading of the torpedoes."

Alcott made some plans rapidly. They stood staring at each other again for another minute. In that time, the American's daring idea completed itself as they stood tense and quiet.

"So you're von Rausenhardt, eh? I think I remember you at Heidelberg."

"You were at Heidelberg? A student there? You are an American, yes?"

"Ballistics, eh? As I remember, you were always puddling around with stink bombs, gunpowder, and potash weren't you? and you're the baby who's fixing up the nice little Wailing Winnies that are blowing women and kids to bits around London, eh? Well, let me tell you something, Rausenhardt. You're through from now on."

"And how do you expect to do this?" inquired the professor.

"How long have you been here?" demanded the American.

"Oh, I only came tonight. None of my new torpedoes have been used as yet," explained the frightened Jerry, hoping that this information would soothe the blazing-eyed Yank.

"Fine. Who let you in?"

"Two men of the night guard."

"And none of the officers have seen you yet, eh?" grinned Alcott.

The Jerry professor gasped. He began to see the light.

"Come on. Peel off that trick uniform and make it snappy. If anyone calls, you are to tell them that you are not to be disturbed, understand? And if you behave yourself and do as you are told, you'll be treated fine—but one false move and you'll get a bellyful of lead."

The quaking professor began frantically to shed his clothes.

"Show me your papers and credentials," snapped Bill, "and any of the blueprints of the torpedo you happen to have around handy. Get 'em all out. I'll load those babies tomorrow!"

FOR an hour the American pumped his captive until he knew almost every angle on the operation of the device. With that he trussed the German up and stowed him away in the bedroom closet.

"It'll be tough there for a day or two," he agreed, "but you'll have to put up with it. You'll realize how some of the boys up in the front line feel, trying to sleep in a two-by-four dugout. I'll see that you get plenty of grub. You Jerries are sweet gorgers, I know. But listen, von Rausenhardt, if you try to do

any yelling when anyone's around, I'll finish you like I would a rat!"

The next morning the pseudo Herr Doktor von Rausenhardt appeared at the concrete shell in which the vital machinery that controlled the workings of Wailing Winnie were housed. He was surprised to note that the device was under the care and supervision of German Navy men.

After much bowing and scraping, during which time Bill prayed for the breaks the warrant officers in charge greeted him and asked if *Herr Doktor* looked the mover.

"Remove them from this rack," ordered the trick professor. "I am to prepare three special loadings for the device. We no longer terrorize those damned Englishmen. We must devise something better. Today I shall give them something new in aerial torpedoes. *Gott!* How they will wail."

The two warrant officers stared at the quiet young professor, of whom they had heard so much. What had he in his mind? Maybe a new and deadly gas. Maybe a new brand of liquid fire. No one knew.

Orders were barked. Cranes groaned. Chains clanked. Monster winged projectiles were hoisted about and placed ready for *Herr Doktor* to fill.

"I wish to be alone. This is dangerous work. If anything goes wrong, I wish to be the one to suffer. You will go. I will send for you when I desire the explosive chambers tightened," *Herr Doktor* explained.

The awed warrant officers withdrew respectfully.

Once inside the great steel and concrete shelter, Alcott wasted little time. He was delighted that his ruse had worked so well and had allowed him to go this far with his work. In front of him lay three of the aerial monsters that were terrorizing England. Three blunt snarling steel projectiles, fully twenty feet long, with short, broad finlike wings that protruded from their bulging sides.

At the front was a four-bladed steel prop about four feet in diameter. Behind this, housed in the heavy steel, was fitted a blunt-cylindrical rotary motor. A quick

inspection disclosed that this engine was fed by a small tank of petrol that would probably run the whirling plant for about ten minutes.

Well, that would be enough to do the trick if the torpedo was given an initial thrust into the air. He inspected further. Behind the rotary motor was a square steel box, inside of which was fitted a gyroscopic control set, much like those used on certain types of naval torpedoes, and in addition there was an intricate control mechanism that was connected to the rudders.

"Hm," mused Aleott. "The gyroscope evidently keeps her on an even keel, and the radio-controlled rudder guides her on her way. They must have the motor adjusted for the range. They evidently fire this thing off the long steel guides out there by compressed air and get her up to her height. Then the motor takes up the work and lengthens out the trajectory so that they are able to hurl the damn thing so far. Well, here's where we start to draw her teeth."

Fumbling about with his blueprints, obtained by pointed persuasion from von Rausenhardt. Bill sought the main explosive chamber. With a wrench he removed the long detonator piece that was designed like the nose cap of a large shell. After that, he neutralized the silk bags of high explosive with a container of chemical that was kept around the great powder chamber.

"That'll take the sting out of Winnie's whistle," he grinned to himself. "Now for the rest of the gag."

BEFORE he replaced the explosive chamber plate, he carefully removed from his pockets the blueprints, charts, sheets of figures, and curves that he had taken from the German professor and wrapped them in a strip of oiled silk he had ripped from his old flying-coat lining. This valuable bundle was stowed away in the first torpedo.

Another packet—more detailed information and drawings on the gun and her emplacement—was placed in the second. The third was stuffed with hurried drawings showing the exact position of the

gun and further details on how it was operated. In addition he wrote three letters, all in the same vein, to Major Webster, No. 11 Squadron, Independent Air Force, B. E. F. France, explaining his own position and arranging for his rescue, if possible. One was placed in each torpedo.

"No use putting all your eggs in one basket," reflected Bill, as he put the plates back into position and started the heavy lug-screws. Then he called for the warrant officers and watched them complete the job of tightening the plates.

"What time is Admiral Kinzman planning for the firing?" inquired *Herr Doktor*.

"At three o'clock today, professor," replied a warrant officer. "It is the first daylight attempt. We feel that now is the time to give the damned Londoners a real taste of this sort of thing."

"Good!" replied Bill. "That is much better for my plans." He really meant it, too. For if he could get the information he desired through earlier the chances of his getting away soon were better.

He went on. "Yes. That is good. See that my luncheon is sent to me at my shed. I do not wish to be disturbed until that time. And above all, remember that these torpedoes are not to be touched until you are ready to fire them. I will not be responsible if more oxygen is allowed in beyond the explosive chamber plate!"

The half-frightened Naval men touched respectful cap-peaks. *Herr Doktor*, with a final glance around the chamber, strode out.

Promptly at three o'clock the torpedo crew began to take up their positions around the giant catapult that was to start the first Wailing Winnie on her way. There was a clanking and chugging somewhere inside, as a blunt engine began to pump the great discharge chambers full of compressed air. Then there was more rattling and clanking as the first torpedo was wheeled out to the curved platform of the great weapon. Bill Alcott sauntered up to watch the operations. Admiral Kinzman greeted

the bogus professor for the first time. He had not met the noted gentleman before. Their salutations were spiked with much bowing, much guttural speech, and a full charge of mutual admiration.

"We are preparing to fire your new explosive, *Herr Doktor*," went on the admiral. "The first is going into the breech now. Will you come to the control pit?"

"Thank you, admiral," responded the phoney *Doktor*. This was just what Bill had been hoping for.

HE SAW the great torpedo moved out from the concrete shed and set upon the breech tray Husky Naval men rammed it correctly in its notched slots, turned to the two gauge dials, and inspected the compression strength in the two great steel chambers below. Thousands of pounds of intense pressure were held in those tanks to hurl Wailing Winnie off for the first quarter of her one-hundred-mile flight. Two men adjusted the release tray and turned to salute the admiral. All was ready.

"You must have the honor of releasing the first one, professor," smiled the admiral, moving up to take his place on the control platform.

"I should like to," responded Bill.

"Elevate guides!" bellowed the admiral. Then came a torrent of mysterious figures. There was much cranking of great winches. Up went the steel guides of the great weapon to an elevation of nearly forty degrees. They pointed well over the tree tops now. Again came that stinking cloud of black smoke that was intended to obliterate the whole wood from the eyes of prying airmen.

The steel railway truck swung off a few points on its base. More angular corrections were made. They had to allow for the rotation of the earth. In firing a shot this distance, unless allowance was made for the earth movement, the torpedo would probably drop a mile or more beyond the objective. Then there was the curvature of the earth to account for, and only the actual straight-line distance between the weapon and its objec-

tive could be considered to get accurate results.

All this was digested by the disguised Yankee airman.

More orders were bawled out. An officer spoke into a phone, and two Jack Johnsons on either side began firing. At last the old girl was ready for her act. The men in charge of the radio-control panel stared out from their room, ear-phones clamped to their ears, and a dozen twinkling dials and needles waiting to record the actual path of the great torpedo.

"All right, professor," smiled the admiral. "We are ready. Will you pull the control lever?"

With a queer feeling at the pit of his stomach, the phoney *Doktor* went to the control board. With a silent prayer he drew the long steel lever over.

There was a hissing wail that screamed up to an ear-splitting screech. The great tray skimmed away and rushed up the guides, and the first great torpedo was on her way. Before he could recover from the initial shock, the missile had raced away and disappeared.

Admiral Kinzman stared at his wrist-watch. After twenty-five seconds, he looked up and said, "The torpedo is now seven miles high. The motor has been automatically switched on. In another minute she will be at the top of her trajectory, or about twenty-five miles high. The velocity is now 2,200 feet per second."

"Good God!" breathed Alcott, amazed.

The admiral went on, still looking at his watch, "She has now been traveling for three minutes. She is down to the twelve-mile level again. The motor is taking up the forward thrust. She has a speed of 3,300 feet per second. In another two minutes she will drop somewhere in London."

"Strike me pink, as Stewart would say," Bill said to himself.

The men went through these movements twice more, and Bill's three aerial torpedoes with their deadened explosive and pockets of important information went screaming on to London. Inside the

radio control room, two men sat, directing the flight of the last one. A master control dial needle flickered and strained over the semicircle of degrees. By moving a black handle back and forth, they were able to hold the needle true to the desired course. One of the men stared at a stop-watch, watching the hairlike needle whirl around the face.

Suddenly he grunted, and a large switch was yanked down. The aerial torpedo was now on the outskirts of London. The switch back in the *Foret de Blange* had cut her motor. The nose dropped, and with a glide of about sixty degrees, she shot earthwards. Thus the reward of years of patient labor, experiment and secret planning.

Bill and the admiral had moved inside to watch the operation of the control board.

"Which do you consider the most important of the whole device, admiral?" inquired Bill, as the Naval men started to cover up the instrument panel.

"Well, professor," answered Kinzman, "the torpedo itself is a marvelous instrument, but it would be useless without the control device which guides it on its way once we have released it from the guides. We can build dozens, yes hundreds of the torpedoes, but I question whether we could build another of these wireless control devices for at least two or three years. Every part was made by hand. Every armature was wound by hand and tested coil by coil. And the present time, there is a serious shortage of first-class copper wire that goes into the special coils. I honestly doubt whether we could replace it for two years, at least. Can you wonder that we guard it so jealously?"

"That is interesting," nodded the phoney *Doktor*. "Tomorrow I will be here with a new type of liquid fire. Something those damned Englishmen will not be able to extinguish so easily. How does that sound, admiral?"


"Ah, you chemists! You truly are winning the war for the Fatherland," smiled the Naval officer. "I leave it all to you."

"Yes," nodded the professor. "You leave it all to me. I'll take care of the shells."

There was a queer smile on the face of the *Doktor* as he went back to his hut.

CHAPTER V

LONDON LAUGHS



BLIGHTY had been bombed again. Three more monster projectiles from the gullet of Wailing Winnie's back parlor had plunked down on the cobble streets of cosmopolitan London. But this time there were no casualties. There was no wailing of bereaved mothers and frantic officials. There were no destroyed churches or blasted homes. No wreckage to speak of. No horror. No screeching of ambulances.

London actually laughed when the first blast of surprise had trickled off. London under the fire of Wailing Winnie took time out to create a new string of jokes and catchwords. The *Daily Mail* carried the prize story of the war. Paris chuckled. London roared and New York screamed. A few hours later, the high officials of Germany swore.

The first torpedo had skimmed across the apartments of Chelsea and dropped with a boiler-factory clank into Sloan Square. Great chunks of asphalt went flying across the roadway, and one piece went crashing against the temporary Y. M. C. A. hut erected at one side. For five minutes there was a mad scurry. Soldiers on leave, or marching back to their quarters at the Chelsea Barracks, were seen diving for underground entrances, basement doorways, and even gutters.

But nothing further happened. London stood still for five minutes and waited. Somewhere near Earl's Court another shell went plop, and landed in an old gentleman's private garden, tossing the hollyhocks, lad's-love, and primroses all over the landscape. The third came to rest in Bushby Park, sending the lambs scattering all over the turf and getting

them tangled up with the hikers on the footpaths.

But to get back to the Wailing Winnie that dropped in Sloan Square.

For several minutes, private citizens peered at it from behind great trees. Old ladies lifted their skirts and cantered off, seeking taxicabs or chemist's shops, where they could purchase smelling salts. Seasoned soldiers came up from their funk holes and wondered. What the devil was that big black monster out there? It was long, like a great naval torpedo. It had wings and a propeller like an airplane. The guy who could fly that certainly had come a cropper.

Then out of the Sloan Square Y. M. C. A. hut stalked one Private Jimmy Dunn, the nut of the 114th Regiment, recruited in New Jersey. He had been holding a quiet argument with one Albert Hawkins, a new recruit of the King's Royal Rifles, concerning the relative merits of Keating's Insect Exterminator as compared to government petrol for ridding oneself of vermin.

The crash of the chunk of asphalt against the side of the hut had cut off all argument. The hut staff had dived under the counters. The other patrons of the hut dropped everything, clattered out of the door, and beat it for the Underground Railway station across the street. With a knowing wink the Cockney calmly helped himself to several packages of Gold Flake cigarettes, handed more to his American pal and scoffed up the remains of three mugs of beer. Stuffing the loot into their pockets, they made for the still open door.

"Let's go an' 'ave a look," said Hawkins.

"Nothing like it," agreed Dunn.

Outside they spotted the great projectile amid a billowing cloud of dust. Dunn gasped. Hawkins whistled. Together they bent slightly forward and squinted at the strange sight ahead.

"Wot's that?" inquired Hawkins.

"Tin Zeppelin, I guess. Wonder who shot it down," went on the American.

"Let's 'ave a look."

"Nothing like it," again answered Dunn.

PRIVATE CITIZENS from the shelter of their front windows watched the strange couple with awe. Seasoned campaigners still hugged their funk holes yelled at them to beat it. But nodding and chatting as though they were about to inspect a recently unveiled statue, the two sauntered across to the aerial torpedo.

"Why, it's a dud!" remarked Hawkins.

"Looks like it, don't it?" replied Dunn.

"Look 'ere," explained the little Cockney. "You lean against it, an' if you can't 'ear it tickin', we'll bung orf, 'cause it's likely to go orf."

"Lean against it, yerself," growled Dunn. "What do you think I am?"

"All right. But if it ain't, it's mine. I've always wanted a real souvenir of the war."

"Yours? Like hell! It's mine. I didn't come three thousand miles to be done out of my rights. Here, I'll soon show you whose it is."

And the little Cockney stood there and watched the Yank scribble all across the nose of the battered aerial torpedo with a piece of chalk.

Captured In London

By

James Dunn, Private, U. S. Army
June 18th, 1918.

"'Ere, wot's the blinkin' game?" demanded Hawkins. "You can't take our stuff like that. Go on 'ome and capture some of yer own!"

"Close it, Hawkins. This is mine. You slink off and find one for yourself." And with that the cocky American started to climb up on top of his souvenir and claim permanent possession.

"Well, I'll be—" started Hawkins, climbing up after him. "Get orf it, I say. It's mine!"

Then the amazed citizenry and members of His Majesty's Forces gradually wormed out of their funk holes and gazed on the maddest scramble of the war. Hawkins biffed Dunn in the eye. Jimmy came back with a short jab, and the Cockney went off the torpedo and flopped back

into the hole plowed up by the Wailing Winnie. Up he went again, like one of the gallant six hundred. This time he caught Jimmy around the waist. For fifteen hectic seconds they scrambled and fought.

"It's mine. I seen it first."

"G'wan. I put my name on it before you. Take that!"

Biff! Bing! Bang!

"Blinkin' Yanks want everything."

"Dumb Limeys! No brains—should have put yer mark on it, if yer wanted it."

Bang! Ugh! Biff!

Then came the screeching of sirens. Uniformed officials rushed up in armored cars. They elbowed and shouldered their way through the circle of soldiers and citizens who stood around the great projectile, watching the dizzy battle that was taking place along its sleek body.

Then an ever-present American newspaper photographer got a shot at it. He snapped another as they yanked the battle-torn Jimmy down, and he pointed to his signature in chalk along the sides of the Wailing Winnie. Then amid all the furore and excitement, Jimmy and Albert wormed their way out, went back to the bar at the Y. M. C. A., and continued their discourse on the merits of Keating's Insect Exterminator.

London had been bombed again. Explosive experts darted in and out. The projectile was covered with a tarpaulin and they went to work. The papers, maps, and charts were discovered. Code messages flashed out across the Channel. Gradually the mad plot of Lieutenant Bill Alcott began to seep in. They had the secret of Wailing Winnie. But poor Alcott was still in Germany, posing as Professor von Rausenhardt.

Within two hours a special plane bearing the important letters and plans were on their way to Major Webster, commanding officer, No. 11 Squadron, Independent Air Force, B. E. F., France. With eyes that squinted and burned, Webster read over the letter again and again.

"I don't know how long I can hold this guy Rausenhardt. But if it is possible, I think you might try having some one fly in here Thursday night at J-16-32, which is an open field a mile or so northeast from here. I'll be there, ready to hop in at 11:30, and will signal with an electric torch—two greens and a red—for safety. Unless the pilot gets that, he is not to come down. If he can't get through, I'll try getting through the lines on Friday or Saturday. But I won't come until I have finished this damned device up right.

ALCOTT."

The major called in his pilots and gave them the gist of the message. "Well, what do you say?" he inquired.

Several jumped at the proposition at once, but Webster was watching Stewart, who sat on the corner of the desk, staring down at the floor. Finally the Englishman straightened up, took a cigarette from a silver case, lighted it, and turned to the major.

"I don't want to butt in on this thing, Webby, old egg," he opened.

The major went four shades of blue.

"But I was thinking," went on the pilot, emitting a long stream of smoke from his pursed lips. "I have had more time on Bristol's than anyone here, and probably I could bung it up as well as anyone. You know what I mean. Have an idea Alcott would be looking for me, and I'd hate to let him down." He was almost apologetic in his explanation.

"Righto," beamed the major, cooling down somewhat. "You'll do. The rest of you stand by for a special patrol tomorrow."

Stewart continued to sit on the major's desk, rapping his heels against the legs.

"Damn nice of you to volunteer for that job, Stewart," opened the major again. He felt that he ought to say something.

"Don't bother. I've been wanting to fly a Bristol again for some time. By the way, Webster, what do you think of a Lee Enfield for elephant hunting?"

The major's clenched fists went straight up over his head. It was complete and total surrender.

CHAPTER VI

THE WAILING WINNIE WALLOPER



BACK at Wailing Winnie's headquarters, business went on as usual for several hours after the last three torpedoes had been hurled on London. Late that night, however, news

had seeped through to the Imperial Command, via Holland, that something was queer at Foret de Blange. London was laughing over the recent bombing. Something had gone wrong. The torpedoes had not burst. They were all duds. Wires immediately began to hum, and some one's head was demanded.

In *Doktor* Rausenhardt's shed, Bill Alcott was all pins and needles. He was having his hands full keeping the legitimate *Doktor* quiet and reasonably well fed. There were times when he was forced to remove *Herr* Rausenhardt's gag, and there was always a possibility that one of the members of the crew would visit the hut on some errand or another, which in turn might give the captive a chance of making a disturbance.

"Just one more day, old boy," explained Bill to the bound professor. "I've given the British all the plans and the position of the redoubt. Tonight I'm going to blow her up myself, barge off back to Cassel, and apply for a leave to Paris. How does that sound?"

"You are inhuman!" gargled von Rausenhardt. "That beautiful device! All of our efforts wasted! It was a gift to scientific warfare. You should be satisfied now. Why not get away while you have the chance, and let your airmen take the risk of destroying it?"

"Like hell!" snapped Bill. "I came to get Wailing Winnie, and I'm not going back until I do. The gun base and the control device are the main things. It will take you guys months to replace them. I know because old Kinzman let the cat out of the bag. A lot of wise birds, you Germans."

"You'll never be able to do it. The control pit is watched too closely," parried Rausenhardt.

"Never mind probing. I'm not telling you how I'm going to pull it off. And what's more, you are going to be particularly quiet for the next ten hours or I'll blow the top of your thatch off as soon as I look at you!" said Bill, tying the gag back into place and thus closing the conversation.

He had hardly shut the cupboard door and returned to the study room of the shed when he stalked the admiral. His genial face was ashen-white. Bill knew something was in the wind, and he set himself for a quick movement.

"Professor," said Kinzman, "we have had bad news from Berlin."

"Bad news, admiral?" repeated the phoney professor.

"Yes, bad news. The shells were duds. They did not explode. Can you account for it?"

"Duds? Did not explode?" parried the American. "That's strange. I took particular care to set those fuses for Percussion Graze explosion. I wanted the torpedoes to explode above ground so as to distribute the force of the shrapnel over a wider area and thus create more death. I am surprised. Some one must have meddled with them after I set them for firing."

"Well, we are in a fine fix. A committee will be here from Krupp's late this afternoon to investigate. Some of your laboratory men will be here also. Perhaps you can work out this problem together."

"A committee from Krupp's?" gasped Alcott. "Coming here this afternoon?"

"Yes. They will be here in time for supper, perhaps. I thought you would like to know so that you can show them your formulas and explain how you loaded the torpedoes yesterday."

"Thank you, admiral," answered Bill as the Navy man went out of the door.

"Well, here's a pretty kettle of sardines," he grinned. "I've got to get out of here early, or these Krupp eggs will nail me at once. Well, here goes. Wailing Winnie has got to go."

FROM a drawer rudely fitted to the table the professor had used to do his figuring upon, Bill took a coil of grayish rope. This was slipped into his coat pocket. From a shelf on the other side of the room he took a large electric torch. He tested its bulbs and lenses. They were all okay.

Down the narrow path to the gunpit he strode, thinking hard. By the time he was within a few hundred yards of the redoubt his mind was made up.

"Where's Admiral Kinzman?" he demanded of the corporal in charge of the guard.

"The admiral has gone up to Bruges, *Herr Doktor*," replied the corporal.

"I'm going to work in the magazine for a while, corporal," explained the phoney professor. "I do not wish to be disturbed for some time. I am going to test the trinitrotoluene."

"Yes, sir," responded the corporal, moving forward to raise the great steel door that led down to the great magazine that lay alongside the gun emplacement.

Once inside, Alcott turned on the electric light and went calmly to work. His coil of gray rope was unwound and measured off. At one end the American bound a handful of loose cordite.

"Might as well make sure, you know," he mused to himself as he inspected his handiwork.

Along the floor lay several lengths of electric conduit pipe. With a low cry of joy he selected one of these and started threading his gray rope through it. Then the pipe and its protruding rope and bunch of cordite were laid along the wall on the side nearest to the gun emplacement. Then began the work of the morning. A silken bag of powder was slit open and poured on the tip of the cordite fuse. One hundred and twelve pounds of high explosive were ready for action now. Then on top went sack after sack of powder, until the whole side was piled high with bags of doom.

"That ought to do it if anything will," grinned Bill through his perspiration and grime. He mopped his brow and went

through all of his pockets to make sure he had everything he would require for the rest of his adventure. He pulled on his coat, adjusted his hat and belt, gazed around the magazine again, and prepared to leave.

Satisfied that all was well—for him—he drew a match from his pocket, kneeled down and lighted the fuse. He stayed long enough to watch the sparkling snake slide into the metal pipe, on its way to the bunch of cordite.

Up the steps he went like a cat. With an effort he forced the great steel door open. His hand went to his coat pocket as two officers leaped forward.

"Do you need any help down there, professor?" inquired one.

"No, not just now. I must go back to my shed for a small scale," exclaimed the *Doktor*."

"Let us send a man for you," continued the officer.

"No, there are several other things I require also. Some figures and charts which I need to make this special test," fenced the American, edging away.

"These crazy professors," smiled the young officer. "All they know is figures and formulas."

They watched him hurrying down the narrow path that led to the hut. Their eyebrows went up to meet their flaxen locks as they saw him break into a trot. They turned and glanced again at the great steel door of the magazine. A tiny wisp of smoke trailed out through the narrow aperture.

INSTANTLY they realized that something had happened. For a second or two they stood speechless. Finally one broke into a canter and headed off in the same direction the professor had taken. The other leaped for an emergency fire-handle and attempted to flood the magazine. He had hardly reached the long lever when a Gargantuan roar went up.

A blistering flame seared foliage for three hundred feet in all directions, licked out lives, burned away metal, and blasted concrete into powder. Chunks of masonry went sky-high; lengths of steel

girders went sailing upward, twisting and turning like matchsticks from a chimney. The great guides of Wailing Winnie flopped over at a grotesque angle, and the massive gears, cogs, slides, and toothed guides of the device were bent and battered into a mass of tangled nothingness. Screams of pain-mad humans arose from the heaps of *débris*. Hoarse cries and orders stabbed out of the smoke and stench of burned explosive. But no orders, no matter how authoritative, could save Wailing Winnie now. She had thrown her last shell.

A wild-eyed German professor lay hunched in a musty cupboard a quarter of a mile away. He knew that Wailing Winnie's reign was over. A mile away, a strangely garbed individual was streaking it for a patch of woods that lay northeast of *Foret de Blange*.

Along the whole Front it was known that something had happened. A dump had gone up somewhere, or a mine had been exploded. But a balloon observer sitting up over *Dixmude* was the first to make a definite report.

"Huge explosion in *Foret de Blange* near *Bruges* at 10:30," his report had come down over the wire.

A group of staff officers in a battered chateau near *Cassel* grabbed the buff form on which the report had been telegraphed.

"Great guns! He's done it," they cried.

A fleet-winged Bristol Fighter roared down the dimly lit airdrome of the *Salamander* squadron at 10:30 that night, exactly twelve hours after Wailing Winnie's demise. A cool, nonchalant Englishman was at the stick.

"Best of luck, sor," Groggings whispered, as the Englishman climbed into the cockpit. "I know you'll do yer best to get Mr. Alcott back, won't you, sor? Pukkah pilot, Mister Alcott, sor."

"Don't you start fussing, Groggings," frowned Stewart, who was in the depths of thinking up a new cocktail. "I'll get Mr. Alcott. Pick him up just like the Bengal Lancers snatch up a tent-peg. Come on, swing the plank."

He was roaring up to the line now, the Rolls Royce Eagle beating out a

steady song of power. Stewart sat back and scanned the skies like a true knight of the air. There was nothing particularly sluggish about him, once he had edged the throttle forward. His muscles were tense, and yet they responded to the impulses of his brain like the well-oiled parts of a fine machine.

Through wisps of vapor he dodged, shutting off his engine now and again to put the sound-range finders off. Odd shells were released at him, but none found their mark. Like a phantom, the cool Stewart guided his craft through every bit of cover available. He cut and curled about like a wraith. Below he could see streaks of flame slide across wide open spaces—enemy aircraft coming up to seek him.

"No, Jerry, I can't be bothered with you now. Have to pick up old Alcott, the Wailing Winnie Walloper," he advised over the edge of his cockpit.

THE Bristol headed across the lines below Dixmude and raced through the night for Bruges.

His engine was shut off again, and the big Bristol two-seater glided for miles while the Englishman consulted his map and the ground below. For five minutes he pored over the sheet and the gray earth beneath. Finally he picked the spot he was looking for.

Down went the nose of the Bristol, and Stewart allowed her to skim over the proposed landing ground. He was dead into the wind when suddenly ahead of him flashed out a green beam of light.

Before he had covered the full length of the field, another green and red beam flashed out.

The Bristol roared out. There were some shots fired from somewhere, but Stewart kept to his job. Pulling a wire in his cockpit, he ignited his wing-tip flares.

Suddenly from the darkness staggered a dim figure. Stewart had his pistol out, ready for a grim and gory finish. The man was in a strange uniform. He struggled with something heavy. He lumbered on up to the ship.

The man staggered to the fuselage and hoisted something up. It fell with a resounding crash into the rear cockpit.

"Let her go, Gridley," bellowed the Yankee.

"What was that you dropped inside—an anvil!" bellowed the pilot.

"No. That's a chunk of Wailing Winnie's compression chamber. I told you I'd bring you a piece. The damn thing nearly got me while I was running away from the big blow-up. It fell nearly a quarter of a mile away and lopped out a chunk of my scalp."

The Limey pilot stared at a dirty bandage made from Alcott's shirt, which bound up a gory spot.

Stewart roared, "Two greens and a red for the Wailing Winnie Walloper!"

"Yeh. Two crèmes de menthes and a vin rouge. Let's go," grunted the American.


The Bristol Fighter roared away into the night.

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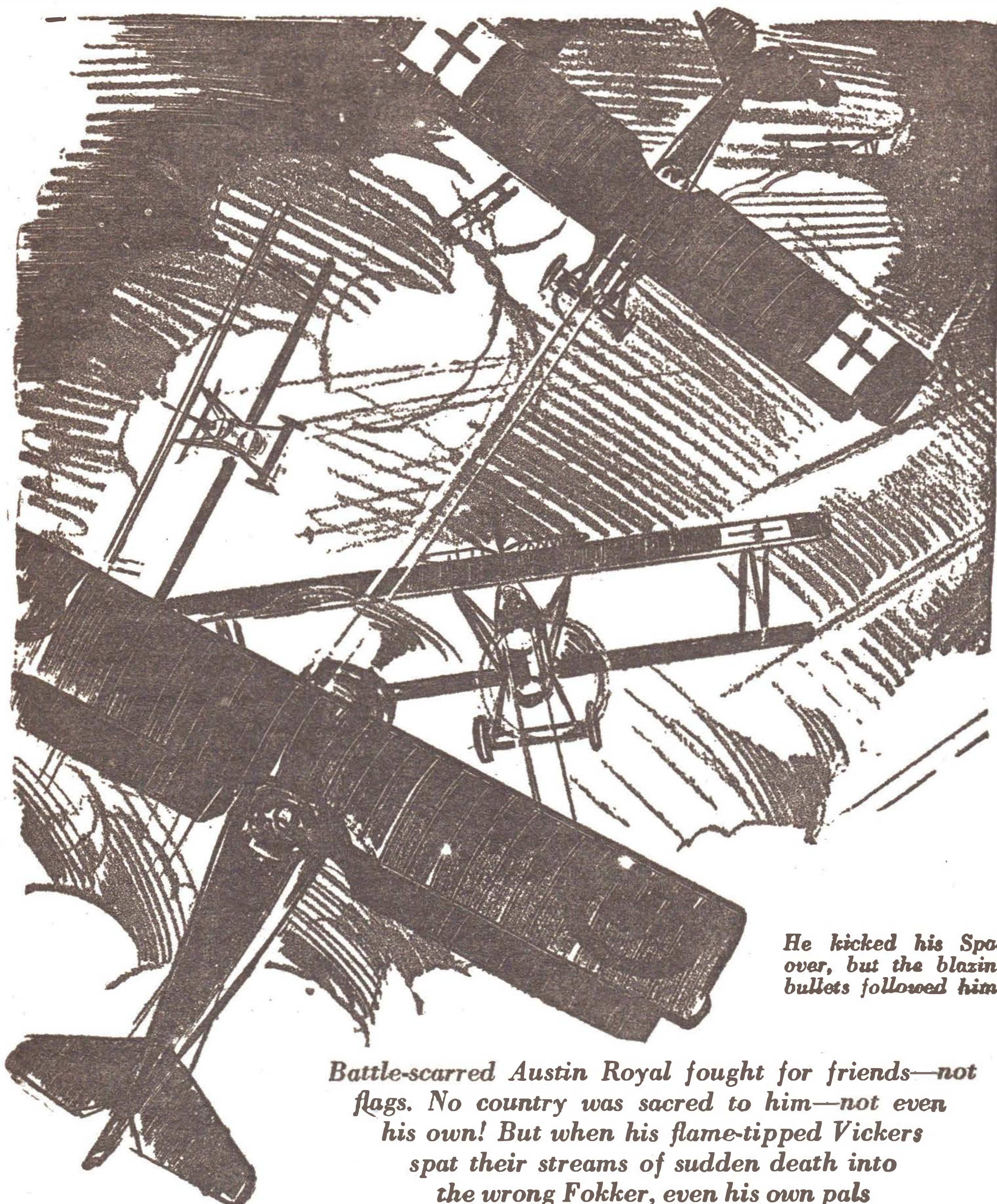


STAR

STAR

WORLD'S
LARGEST-SELLING
SINGLE EDGE BLADE

FOR GEM AND
EVER-READY RAZORS



He kicked his Spad over, but the blazing bullets followed him!

Battle-scarred Austin Royal fought for friends—not flags. No country was sacred to him—not even his own! But when his flame-tipped Vickers spat their streams of sudden death into the wrong Fokker, even his own pals palled on him! It was then that he vowed to make just—

One Last Patrol

By RALPH POWERS

SPADS barked and growled in the chill mists of a new day. A motorcycle shot out of the mists, ignored the C. O. and the group of flyers hunched

in sidcott suits, and pulled up before one of the barrack quarters. A figure toppled out of the side car as a companion slid off the motorcycle and lost his balance.

The smaller of the pair that made their unsteady way into the fog-en-shrouded quarters was the famous and notorious Austin Royal, the man who had made more aviation history than any other man of his time. Late of the Lafayette Escadrille, before that commissioned major, colonel, general, admiral, and what have you of the Bulgarian, Serbian, Bolivian, Cantonese, and other *de facto* governments. And in 1914 he had actually been commissioned by the Austrian air forces, along with his pal of several wars, Karl von Hoeffner. But von Hoeffner had been given a raw deal and was reported killed.

The battle-scarred Austin Royal fought for pals, not flags. He had walked out—or, more literally, flown out—on Austria, and so was eligible for a firing squad any time he dropped behind the enemy lines.

Just now his pal was the giant and good-natured Bill Harper. The two had overstayed a hectic Paris leave.

A biting command from the C. O. swung them around. Major Lawson compared in every respect unfavorably with Royal. He was smaller, and several years younger. He owed his promotion partly to his relationship to a prominent political figure. He hated Austin Royal because the world-famous flyer made him feel conscious of his limitations and belittled the authority the gold leaf gave Lawson.

Lawson experienced the annoying sensation that Royal merely tolerated serving under him. He had some reason for this sensation. Even Bill Harper, Royal's particular pal in this *guerre*, had anxious moments when he feared the restless urge would induce Royal to go "over the hill."

In Paris, Royal had been referring to himself as a citizen of the world, a man without a country, under no obligation to any one flag. And Royal had walked—or rather, flown—out on other countries. Why not on the U. S. A.?

"Royal, report to your commanding officer!" spat the C. O.

"I'm getting my flying duds."

"You won't need them. Greenough is

leading A flight. Remain in your quarters, both of you."

Royal's fists tightened and his jaw hardened, but Harper swung him around. "C'mon, Aussie," he said.

The wiry Royal dropped to a bunk. The lanky, broad-shouldered Harper fished a cigarette out of his pocket and snapped it in half. Royal ignored the offer. His eyes clouded sullenly. Bullets and sabers had creased that stern visage.

"I've made aviation history, and a little squirt—"

"Easy, Aussie. He can give the orders, but we can run the show when we're in the air. That's the best part of the Air Service."

A knock sounded on the door and Greenough entered.

"Lieutenant Harper," he announced, "Major Lawson has assigned you to fly with me. I'm rather glad, because I have three replacements in the flight."

Royal stood up. "Do you mean to tell me Lawson is sending three new men out with you? Why, *you* haven't had twenty hours of front-line flying!"

Greenough colored slightly. "I expect to do my best."

"Come here."

Greenough obeyed the impelling tone as though hypnotized. Royal's fist shot out mercifully true, and the startled Harper recovered quickly enough to catch the kayoed pilot before his head hit the floor.

"Come on," snapped Royal, eyes smoldering. "Sending out kids that haven't learned to use a razor yet! That's your country for you."

Harper frowned and bit his lip. When Royal used the expression "your country," there was cause to worry.

Major Lawson had gone to the operations room after issuing orders to Greenough. Royal and Harper joined the wondering and waiting pilots.

"Get in your hacks," barked Royal. "Pete," he said to a flyer named Carey, "if any Jerries jump us, lead these infants home. Bill and I will attend to the E. A.'s."

A FLIGHT droned along in the early morning. Three replacements, with pounding hearts, tried to remember their lessons.

Royal saw trouble and tried to avoid it, but the flight of six Fokkers screamed down for action. Royal signaled to Pete to cut away the fledglings, while he and Harper whipped their Spads around to meet and delay the attack.

The Fokkers tried to ignore the two veterans and stick to the fleeing four. Royal and Harper gunned their crates, and wing to wing flanked the plunging Fokkers. Vickers yammered like rivet guns. Tracers lanced the intervening space. Perforations colandered the red hulks of the two Fokkers. Black wings whistled over as wily Krauts sensed a master's hand.

The Jerry flight broke. Instantly the leader abandoned his original purpose. The Krauts converged to settle with the pair who could send four companions away and remain for battle.

The initial charge split the Spad pals. Royal came out of a vertical to rake a Fokker with flaming Vickers, but out of the corner of one eye he watched a second Fokker evidently piloted by the leader of the flight. Royal saw him pull a tight loop. He followed with a half-roll that deceived the world adventurer. Royal barely kicked over as a burst of Spandau fire chewed strips of fabric out of a wing. Royal spiraled over on even keel and took his hands from his stick long enough to applaud his adversary. The Jerry waved his hand in acknowledgment. It was a friendly joust—with the life of either at stake.

They then settled down to the grim business of killing each other. Each man knew he had no ordinary adversary. Royal scowled and glared over his shoulder at his determined foe. There were other Fokkers to be watched, too, and Harper had his hands full. No help could be expected from that quarter.

Royal realized he had to get leg room to assure making his scrap a one-to-one affair for the time being. But the Jerry trumped his maneuvers. Royal saw the

Boche Ace pull stunts Royal believed copyrighted by himself. Spandau bullets creased the Spad's wings, but Royal reserved his fire. He would not betray his marksmanship—yet!

The Fokker gave him a split-second target as he slowed in a climb. Royal tripped home, training his gun just above and ahead of the climbing Fokker. Another split second and the Fokker would be dragging through the path of death. But instantly the Boche killed his motor and plummeted, tail down.

For a moment Royal thought he had bagged his man, but almost immediately he knew better. He started to follow, then realized that his adversary would have to go down to the carpet. That meant leaving Harper alone with four skilled sky slayers.

Royal roared out of a diving swoop and came up under the scrap that the hard-pressed Harper was waging. From well beyond a reasonable range, Royal pressed home at the Fokker sliding past his sights. Luck favored his touch. He saw a finger of flame curl out from the Fokker. It mushroomed into an explosion.

A second Boche, racing in on Harper, turned to observe his partner's fate. In that instant Harper came out of his Immelmann and dropped on the unwary Kraut. There was a burst of Vickers fire, and the second German went whining down to oblivion.

Royal smiled grimly. Bill could handle the remaining two. Where was the enemy leader?

A burst of machine-gun fire startled Royal. Instantly he kicked over, but the pounding, blazing bullets followed. Tracer smoke burned acridly in Royal's nose, and chips flew into his face. He felt the brush of death. Suddenly Royal threw up his hands, and his Spad went into a mad spin that presaged the last ride to Valhalla. Awkwardly, apparently, the Spad came out of the plunge as if unguided by any conscious pilot.

But the surprised Jerry, roaring down to make certain of his kill, unexpectedly found himself beneath the guns of the

Spad—fooled by an old possum trick. Desperately the Boche tried to escape. Royal followed, pumping Vickers bullets as he plunged with wing-ripping speed. He saw the German plane make a half-decent landing and then flop over like a dying bird, throwing its pilot free.

Royal dropped into the field and leaped from his plane as it rolled to a stop. He hurried over—and then abruptly checked his steps, like one petrified with amazement. For the Jerry's toss had thrown free his helmet, exposing the blond head and blood-smearred features. The German looked up. Incredulity puckered the blue eyes and then they softened with recognition and belief. A smile played at the lips from which blood seeped.

"I'm glad it was you, Aussie," he muttered with difficulty. "I feel much better. *Auf Wiedersehen.*"

Royal dropped to his knees and picked up the bared head in his arms. The blood-slaked lips tried to find further words and failed. Royal felt the life seep out of the form in his arms.

"**K**NOW him, Aussie?" Royal had not heard Harper land. A German might have done so as easily.

Royal laid the slain German down on the grass.

"Know him? It's Karl von Hoeffner."

"You mean the Jerry you joined the Austrians with? But you said he was dead."

"I thought so. He lived long enough for me to kill him. And he saved my life in the Balkans. I take orders from a runt like Lawson to kill a man like Karl."

"Easy, Aussie," protested Harper, alarmed at the fire in the tone and the sparkle in the dark eyes. "You're worked up—"

"Worked up?" Royal laughed insanely. "You mean washed up." Royal reached inside his flying suit and tore his wings free. These he threw in the direction of the wrecked Fokker.

"Aussie!" exclaimed Harper. "You're mad. After all, it's war. He was a German and you're an American."

"Who says I'm an American?" ranted

Royal. "What's an accident of birth got to do with what I am? I haven't seen the States for ten years. Legally, I have been a subject of a dozen countries I have fought for. I'm a citizen of the world—like Karl. And I kill him because a runt like Lawson tells me to. I'd just as soon fight for Germany." The light in his eyes became wilder. "I can take Karl's place. Maybe I can make up that way. I guess they'd be willing to squash that desertion charge."

"Aussie, you're crazy. Let's go back to the drome."

"You can go back. As for me—"

Harper mumbled something for an apology. For a big man, he moved with deceiving speed. A bony fist on the end of a long arm crashed a haymaker off the chin of the staring Austin Royal.

Harper lifted up his unconscious mate and stowed him into the cramped quarters of his Spad. A bullet plowing through the tank of Royal's Spad provided a reasonable explanation for the abandoning. Harper squeezed beside his slumbering pal and lifted for home.

Royal came to as the Spad climbed for altitude. For a moment he blinked in wonder, rubbed his chin reflectively, and stared at Harper.

"Sorry, Aussie. I had to—"

"Cut it," snapped Royal. His jaw set harder and his eyes narrowed in anger.

Royal was first out of the plane as the Spad hit the home tarmac, swinging free before the ship rolled to a stop. He found Major Lawson hurrying over to intercept him.

"Lieutenant Royal," challenged the C. O., "you disregarded my orders. You made unauthorized use of a plane—"

"Never mind the past tense," barked Royal, "I'm going to give you something worth while to base charges on. I never liked that mug of yours and I'm going to do something to change it."

Harper shouted a warning, but the astonished C. O. failed to take heed. Royal's right fist contacted the C. O.'s jaw in a replica of the sleep punch Harper had pinned on Royal a few minutes before.

THE famous Austin Royal rolled into Issoudun with a cynical smile on his black-jowled features. There had been no unfavorable publicity attached to his departure from active duty. Something about a minor accident had been mentioned, and a personal visit of the famous flyer to boost the morale of the cadets. Nothing was said about striking a superior officer.

And Bill Harper thought they would stick Royal in front of a firing squad. He should have known better. War was a game of politics, like everything else. G. H. Q. wouldn't do anything to Austin Royal. They couldn't afford to. They had ballyhooed him too much.

Now General Patton would have to do the dirty work.

Royal found the proper quarters and was admitted to the inner office. Royal had already met the stocky, black-eyed man who wore a star as well as a pair of wings. The general's tunic was open at the throat. He sat smoking a cigar, and his manner was most informal. Royal's brow puckered wonderingly.

"Hello, Royal. Had a little rumpus up front, huh?"

Royal smiled knowingly. "You might as well get my side straight from the beginning," he said. "All this talk about a war to end war and making the world safe for democracy doesn't get anywhere with me. I've been behind the scenes of too many wars not to know that it is the same bunch running the show on both sides."

"But you are an American."

"Sure. I'm a Roumanian. I was a general there, too. I'm what I am wherever I hang my hat, and I haul tail whenever I get the notion."

"You may think so, but it is rooted in every man to fight for the country that gave him birth. You're an American."

"Well, America can get along without me. I've fired my last shot for the Stars and Stripes. And as Pat Henry said, 'If that be treason, make the most of it.'"

General Patton looked out the window. "Stars and Stripes—it's waving out there on the parade ground. It's a pretty flag,

about the prettiest of them all." He turned to the desk and pressed a button.

"Some replacements are going up today," he said, with a change of tone that put Royal on his guard. "I have some instructions to give to one of them."

The door opened, and a youthful officer entered wearing bright wings on a new uniform.

"Aussie! Uncle Austin!"

Austin Royal stared incredulously. Uncle? There was his dead brother David's son—but it couldn't be.

"Of course you wouldn't remember," went on the youth, "but I'd know you anywhere from your pictures. And then I heard that you were here. Oh—" The young officer suddenly remembered where he was, and he drew himself up before the general.

"That is quite all right, Royal," said the general. "We can dispense with formality for the time being." The general crossed to the window.

Young David Royal, Austin Royal was thinking. Yes, he could see the family resemblance about the eyes. And that was his older brother's way of starting his smile at one corner of his mouth. Memories—called out of a past crowded with incidents.

"It's great to really see you," young David went on boyishly. "Only I figured it would be up there and not here. I was lucky enough to be sent to your own outfit."

Austin Royal tensed and glanced toward General Patton, who had his back turned to them.

"But you'll be going back soon," added the young lieutenant confidently.

General Patton turned away from the window and glanced at his watch. "Sorry, lieutenant, you'll have to hurry," he said. "You may have a chance to talk to your uncle again before you take off."

When David had gone, Austin Royal stared at the closed door and then at General Patton.

"Had it all figured out, huh?"

"You mean about your nephew? I wasn't sure. The name is unusual, but he kept his relationship to himself.

Wants to make good on his own. I'm sure he will."

"But he's only a kid."

"Most of our flying personnel is made up of kids. We find it difficult to get flyers of—experience."

Royal's jaw muscles tensed. "Your trick doesn't work. If he is fool enough to take chances, that's his lookout."

"Of course. About your own case—or should I say status?—papers relating to charges seem to have gone astray. It may be some time before they show up. Meanwhile, it is perhaps unfortunate that your injuries keep you from active duty."

IF AUSTIN ROYAL was a prisoner, that fact was not apparent. True, he felt himself shadowed constantly, but he seemed able to go and come as he pleased. He even received permission to go to Paris, although the pleasure was tempered somewhat by the knowledge that his desire to be a man without a country was not being noticed. Planes circling overhead, and he couldn't go in them. Flags flying—and ignoring his failure to salute.

But even in Paris, Royal could not escape that feeling of being entirely out of the picture. There were averted glances in the cafés, suddenly stifled whisperings and forced cheerfulness on the part of old companions. What stories were they spreading about him? Why didn't they prefer charges against him? Soon he would take off for Germany, fight for the Kaiser. Tomorrow. More cognac, *garçon!*

He would slip out to Le Bourget and steal a plane. Let them trail him, then! All the way to Germany. Tomorrow. More cognac, *garçon!*

It was inevitable that Bill Harper would come to Paris. Even Bill's manner had changed. Damned forced cheerfulness. Patronizing him. Where did Harper get off, patronizing him? Austin Royal was a citizen of the world. He could fight for whatever nation he pleased—and when he pleased. He wasn't any flag flyer like Harper. Come on, let's hit some of the old places.

But the more liquor they consumed and the more places they visited, the farther apart the former pals drifted, until they were snapping at each other like a pair of terriers.

"Listen," growled Harper, finally, "I've got more respect for that kid nephew than I have for you."

"Who's talkin' about him?"

"I am. Even if he is going to be killed, I've got more respect for him."

"Who says he's going to be killed?"

"I say so. Lawson's going to kill him. Lawson's giving him tough assignments because he hates your guts."

"Tryin' to get a rise outa me." Royal's unsteady hand dropped the bottle.

"Y' not worth it. The kid's a better man than you are. The kid'll die fightin' fer a princ'ple."

"A flag flyer, huh?"

"Sure, a flag flyer an' not a lousy—what'd they call those guys that sold 'emselves in the Rev'lutionary War? Hessian. A lousy old Hessian."

"Who's a Hessian?"

"You're a Hessian."

The table toppled, along with chairs and glassware. The Madame let out a string of invective and started for a mallet. Guests scrambled for the stone stairs. Harper had size and weight on Royal, but the latter had battled for his life in too many back alleys and out-of-the-way dives in all corners of the world not to have picked up a few tricks.

Royal seemingly left himself open for the chair that Harper all but crashed down on his head. Then, slipping aside, he buried a fist wrist deep into Harper's midsection and sent him crashing into a post. On the rebound, Royal measured an accurate right to the button. Perhaps bad cognac helped, but Royal's buddy sprawled flat on his face.

Bill Harper's plane took off from Le Bourget—but about that time Bill Harper was putting up quite a battle with the M. P.'s back in Paris. Austin Royal sat at the stick of the Spad that climbed into the night, his eyes clearer than his brain.

He would need more fuel to reach Germany. He'd get it from his old drome,

SA

right under Lawson's own nose. A mocking laugh trailed into the wet clouds. He would land in Madame Doucett's back yard. He could find that place blindfolded. And if he met some of his old comrades—Greenough, Bascomb—so much the better. Tonight he would drink with them. Tomorrow—a rendezvous in the clouds, and every man for himself.

FUNNY none of the crowd were here in Madame's. Lawson must have put a ban on the place. Just like him

A uniformed pilot entered and dropped into a chair without glancing around the room. He gave his order to Madame without glancing up. Royal stopped her.

"Tell the lieutenant you are serving the drink here."

The flyer came over eyes wide with surprise. "Aussie! What are you doing here?"

"'Lo, Dave. Call it a flying visit, if you want. Drink up."

Austin Royal's eyes narrowed as he saw David Royal wolf the drink. He signaled the Madame for two more.

"Met Harper in Paris. Tells me Lawson is keeping you pretty busy."

"Yes, but he can't—" David Royal checked himself and grabbed for his second drink. "He thinks I'm afraid to die, but I'm not."

"Why should you be? You've got your country to die for, your flag."

"Yes, I know."

Austin Royal's eyes fixed intently as he revolved his glass in his fingers. "What's the assignment tonight?"

Young Royal's voice broke with a forced laugh. "Just bombing the Jerry dump at Roubermonde."

The glass ceased twirling in the older man's fingers. "Escort?"

"No. No heavy bombers. They've always failed, you know. Too much defense concentration, and even with a heavy bomb, it would take a direct hit. They've got the stuff so far under concrete." The drink vanished and Royal filled the glass again. "Intelligence has found out when the ammo comes up. You know how methodical the Boche are. Well, if a bomb, even a light one, could be dropped at

5:10 in the morning, it would catch a pile unloading at the mouth. All I've got to do is to hit that pile and it will explode the whole dump."

"That's all," agreed Royal quietly. Suddenly David sprawled on his arms, sobbing. "I can't go through with it. I don't want to die. And it's death—suicide."

"Suicide, nothing! It's murder, plain, unadulterated murder. But you'll fool them. You'll come back, too. Have another drink."

David took his drink. "I'm sorry. I must seem like a washout to you."

"Don't be crazy. You're just young. How young are you?"

"Twenty."

"Got a girl back home?"

David paled. "How did you know?"

"A guy as good-looking as you would have plenty of dames."

David looked away. "No. Only one."

"Have another drink. Ever try mixing your cognac in beer? And *eau de vie*—we'll have a shot of that. That'll put the old heart in you."

The Madame looked dubiously at the pair as she came by the table again.

"Your young *ami*, he ees sleepy."

"*Oui*. Get me a room upstairs. He'll come around all right." Royal slipped a limp arm over his shoulder. A minute or two later he deposited his burden on a creaking bed. So Lawson was going to murder the kid, was he? Well, Germany would get a new flyer tonight—and a prisoner of war. The kid wouldn't like it at first, but he was young. In a few years he would forget.

The form on the bed appeared unusually still, the face pale. Royal slipped his hand inside the blouse. No, the heart was beating. Royal's hand closed on silk. He withdrew a small American flag.

Royal wished he had brought a bottle along. He needed a drink. Cold sweat beaded his face. That striped silk in his hand possessed him. He kept staring at it, opening and closing his fingers.

"Your young *ami*, he ees *bien*?" asked Madame as Royal came downstairs.

"I'm taking the key with me. See that he is not disturbed until morning."

If Lawson had allowed David to fortify himself at the *estaminet*, then David's plane, equipped with bombs, should be in readiness on the tarmac. That was not hard to figure out. Royal could assume his nephew's tone without difficulty. And with goggles and flying suit he ought to pass in the dark.

"Zero hour, sergeant."

"Oh yes, sir. Major Lawson—"

"I have my instructions. Ready on the chocks."

A SPAD lifted toward the faintly pearling east. Austin Royal sat at the stick. A new day saw him keeping his promise of crossing the lines.

He knew the terrain. He had played with death and served as its grim messenger for many weeks. Day or night he could find his way, and his was a gifted instinct for flying born to few men. He knew Rouberronde, and the attempts to bomb the well-protected dump. But every fortress has its weak point, and a bomb dropped at this point at the psychological moment might do all that Lawson's suicidal assignment promised. But Royal did not fly direct for Rouberronde. There was the bridge at Fère à Mouire, also a frequent target for bombers.

Insects were swarming on the blood-red line, Fokkers concentrating above the bridge—Fokkers shot skyward at the alarm of the speeding Spad. Royal climbed higher and higher into the wet mists, laboring for a top ceiling despite the extra load of bombs. He glanced at his illuminated watch dial and then cut his motor. The Spad banked away from its previous course and commenced its long flat glide earthward.

Startled guards about Rouberronde heard the rushing whir of a silenced ship above them. Gunners leaped to the batteries. Soldiers poured into the gun pits. The ground about Rouberronde belched with lethal fire.

Machine-gun bullets tore through his wings as Royal whipped lower. Archie popped about him and filled the air with wailing shrapnel. He had two bombs—and he must not miss. His hand slipped

inside his flying suit and touched the silk flag as if for reassurance, then shifted to the work at hand. One bomb fell away from the Spad. A second followed.

Rising away from the spot, Royal heard the crash of the bomb. It was faint. Had he failed? There was a second explosion, then others, like snapping firecrackers, and then the terrific volcanic eruption that was to be heard back as far as the lines.

Glancing over the side as his plane mounted cloudward, he could see only a rapidly spreading black mantle of smoke where the Rouberronde ammunition dump, target of many an air raid, remained. And then Royal looked ahead. Fokkers were speeding over from a false alarm at Fère à Mouire.

He was playing hide-and-peek in the drifting mists of the new day. Twisting, coaxing, straining the ship riddled with machine-gun fire and shrapnel. Roaring over in an Immelmann when a tormentor became too hot. Blasting away with Vickers and sending a burning plane spiraling earthward in a death screech.

Observers on the 36th tarmac saw a wobbling, fabric-sprayed Spad drop down with its motor missing badly, touch wheels to the tarmac, and then lift over the 36th's headquarters. There sounded the snort of a motor, and the Spad dipped again, this time in the direction of Madame Doucette's well-known café.

CAREFULLY Austin Royal turned the key in the lock. Slowly he opened the door, but the labored breathing within reassured him. Royal stepped inside and closed the door softly. Noiselessly he removed the flying suit and helmet and dropped them on the chair near the sleeping David and then eased himself into the other side of the bed. Presently David stirred.

"What time is it?" he cried. "It's—it's daylight. What have I done?"

"You did plenty, if you ask me," mumbled Austin Royal sleepily. "I took a look at that plane out in the yard when

you came back. You must have had an argument with a sawmill. Some ammo dump at Roubermonde—wasn't that what you said?"

"But I don't remember anything—"

"Don't remember? You must have been drunk—a Royal drunk."

A grinding of brakes sounded on the farther side of the house. Almost immediately voices could be heard below, and then footsteps. The door burst open—but instead of the expected Major Lawson, General Patton stood on the threshold.

"Nice job at Roubermonde," said the general.

"So the kid made it, huh?" yawned Royal, swinging out of the bed. "You'll have to excuse him, general, if he seems a little bit lubricated."

"I guess we can make allowances," said the general quietly. "I happened to be at the 36th on business. Major Lawson has been commissioned to re-

turn to the States to make speeches in the interest of enlistment. You have been offered command of a squadron several times, Royal. Now I am asking you to take over the 36th." He turned to David Royal. "Looking for something, lieutenant?"

"No. Just a silk flag—"

"I think you will find it in your uncle's shirt."

Austin Royal looked down and perceived a corner of the flag sticking out between his shirt buttons.

"I'll be expecting both of you at the drome within an hour," said the general abruptly. The door closed behind him.

"Dave," said Austin Royal, "mind if I keep this flag?"

"No, of course not. But, Aussie—you're not fooling me. I—"

"Have a drink, kid. First thing you know, you'll be getting sober. And if you're gonna fight this *guerre* with me and Bill Harper, that would never do."



Randolph Records Again Shattered!

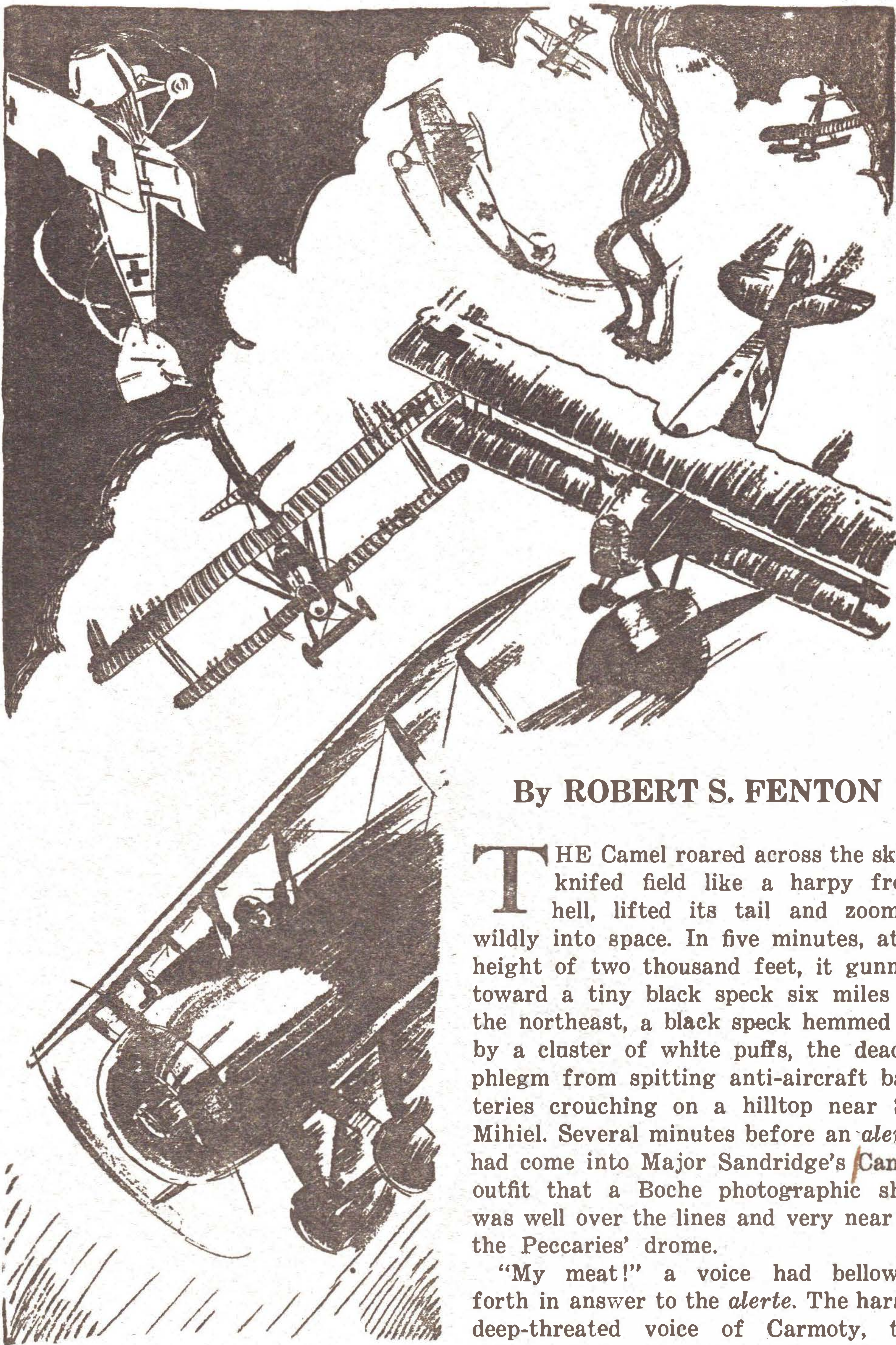
NEW RECORDS were set during the month of April at the Air Corps Primary Flying School at Randolph Field, Texas, when 16,299 hours and 20 minutes of flying time were piled up during the thirty-day period.

This figure constitutes the largest number of hours ever flown by the Spring training classes and is the third largest month in the history of the school. According to present indications, even this figure will soon be surpassed because training activities on both Primary and Basic Stages will be completed before schedule.

A further study of the statistics reveals that all but 2,000 hours of the over 16,000-hour figure was spent on student training activities. Basic Stage, with approximately 190 students, flew a total of 7,429 hours and 45 minutes during the month of April, and the Primary Stage, with an average student class of about 300, flew 6,858 hours and 25 minutes, all for a total of 14,388 hours and ten minutes of student training during the month.

With night flying and avigation training occupying the major portion of the Basic Stage training during April, many of their BT-9's flew more than 100 hours during the month. Practically all of the War Department Training Directive for the permanent personnel of the station is also done in the North American BT-9's, thus helping to build up their total time.

Killer From Nowhere



Another Fokker was sweeping in from right angles to cut the Blaster down.

By ROBERT S. FENTON

THE Camel roared across the skid-knifed field like a harpy from hell, lifted its tail and zoomed wildly into space. In five minutes, at a height of two thousand feet, it gunned toward a tiny black speck six miles to the northeast, a black speck hemmed in by a cluster of white puffs, the deadly phlegm from spitting anti-aircraft batteries crouching on a hilltop near St. Mihiel. Several minutes before an *alerte* had come into Major Sandridge's Camel outfit that a Boche photographic ship was well over the lines and very near to the Peccaries' drome.

"My meat!" a voice had bellowed forth in answer to the *alerte*. The harsh, deep-throated voice of Carmoty, the "Blaster." Fumbling hurriedly with the chin-strap of his helmet with one great

A cruel giant of a man who had been at the Front since the battle of the Somme—that was the Blaster. From the steel skeletons of skyscrapers he had come—from riveter to machine gunner to the Air Corps. No German could down him. No man dared to call his hand—except one—a Yank on his own drome!

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hand, he had shoved another man roughly aside with the other and grinned crookedly: "Blast it, I'm the one to get the Boche! I'll kick him over the field and knock him down in your lap."

That was the Blaster, a giant of a man who had been in the war since the battle of the Somme. From the steel skeletons of embryo skyscrapers he had come to the wars. From riveter to machine gunner to the Air Force.

No man had called his hand—that is, none with the possible exception of one. That man had stood watching Blaster, hands clenched, fingernails biting into the palms of his hands. There had been a strange glint in his eyes, similar to that which one sees in the eyes of a rabbit when it is mesmerized by a serpent. Stark fascination tinged with a faint trace of fear.

The Peccaries on the ground watched the Blaster lift his Camel skyward and sensed rather than actually perceived the fury of both man and machine. The Boche ship was drawing nearer with the anti-aircraft shells following relentlessly. The gunners were putting them in three and fours, and driving the enemy interloper closer and closer to the Blaster's climbing Camel.

"God help that Boche!" The words came from the man who was standing with fists still tightly clenched and lips seamed as he looked on. The other pilots turned to look at him.

"He is the only one who can," said one, and returned his avid gaze back to the scene above.

There followed the sound of chattering machine guns. Tracers penciled the sky. In reply came the Blaster's riveting guns. The Blaster was in! The on-lookers saw his Camel zoom up, barrel-roll, and then come down at the Boche

two-seater, a bolt of lightning with tri-colored cocardes.

A gasp went up from the Peccary field as the Boche ship appeared to falter in its headlong stride for safety. It spun down a thousand feet with the Blaster riding it hard. Then it seemed to leap to life again and the sound of Spandaus answered the fire of the relentless Blaster's Vickers.

The Blaster piqued in, undershot, and the pilots on the ground stopped breathing for a moment as his Camel shuddered and slid off on one wing. Evidently the Boche observer had sprayed the Camel's tail as it had passed below, but the Blaster whipped up and drove home a burst which sent the enemy ship out of control. The two-seater was coming down now, dead stick. Its pilot was hit and, as the Boche ship careened, the watchers saw the observer leave his guns and frantically attempt to fight the ship out of its downward plunge.

From above the Blaster lined up his prey. The deadly rat-a-tat-tat of his guns split the skies. Straight for the field the hapless German ship rocketed. A siren screeched. Groundsmen ran for cover. Pilots involuntarily back-stepped, tongues glued to their palates, their eyes fixed on the thing tearing down through space. Behind it came the Blaster, guns still flaming.

"God!" gasped one pilot, a croak in his voice. "Does he have to do that? Does he—"

Another one laughed mirthlessly. "You ought to know, Carmoty," he said huskily. "Well, God didn't help the Boche, Gorham. Look at them—ah-a-a-a-a!"

AT the edge of the field the Boche Albatross hit with a sickening, splintering crash. The ambulance

wheeled out, stretchers rattling. Major Sandridge ran across the field, barking at groundsmen. Two of them reached the wreck first, Pyrene extinguishers in their hands. They spurted the liquid at a tongue of flame which started to lick out from the wreckage. Others plunged in and tore feverishly at twisted welded tubes, splintered struts, and fabric.

Onto the field the Blaster settled his Camel, fumbling at his safety-belt meanwhile. He lifted his huge frame out of the pit and leaped before his ship had stopped rolling. His triumphant laugh thundered as he ran to the wreck and plunged into the crowd. A groundsmen went spinning.

"Out of the way, soldier," he roared. "I want to see how I've been shootin'." He pawed at the limp thing in the control pit of the Albatros, tipped its head back and then ripped the tunic it wore. Sickened at the sight, pilots looked at the three holes in the Boche pilot's chest.

"That's what I call shootin', eh, what?" bragged the Blaster. "Right through—"

"Carmoty," ripped out Sandridge, the squadron commander, "I think that's going a little bit too far. Get away from there. Haven't you any respect for anything? Get out of there, I tell you!"

Carmoty laughed sneeringly. "Sure, major," he drawled. "Sure, you're the boss. But if these other buzzards here weren't so chicken-hearted, we'd end this damn war sooner than—"

"You dirty skunk, Carmoty! You—"

The Blaster swore, turned to look into the tense, white face of the tall pilot named Reed Gorham. Gorham was lacking in Carmoty's massive bulk, although of equal height. His face was more finely cut, the complete antithesis, in fact, of the Blaster's weather-beaten, hard-bit-ten countenance. His brown eyes, pregnant with loathing, bored into Carmoty's.

"Ah, ha, the little minister again," spat out the Blaster, eyes glittering. "Preachin' to me again." He laughed mockingly and turned his gaze momentarily to the dead Boche, who were being taken away by the crew of the meat wagon. "If you can't stand the sight of

stiffs, you pup, why'd you join up in this man's war? You oughta be with the Y.M.C.A. All that counts in this war is guts, get that? Guts! When you were born, they left them out of your carcass."

"That was a butcher's trick," responded Gorham evenly, his fists clenched, the muscles over his jaws turning white with compressed fury. "A killer's trick." And then the others forgot to breathe an instant as his fist lashed out with lightning swiftness and smashed into the Blaster's mouth.

As if in a mist, Reed saw the bigger man's head sway back a little. It was distorted like an inhuman thing. Those two eyes imprisoned Gorham as a spider mesmerizes a fly. Little streaks of white flame electrified them. They were paralyzing, hypnotic. Gorham tried to lift his arms but they were like dead weights. Then came a white flash, a momentary sensation of pain. He sank down deep—deep

The Blaster's voice stirred him to consciousness. He opened his eyes and found that he was propped up against the side of the Peccaries' mess shack.

"How many times have I gotta lick you, you lily-fingered rat?" the bullying voice was raging. "Some day I'll half kill you." Other faces were swimming around Gorham, the faces of pilots who would have enjoyed smashing Carmoty to a pulp but did not dare. They stared in speechless awe at Gorham for his temerity in alone daring to call the Blaster's hand. With effort Reed arose and stood on trembling legs.

"I still say you're a butcher, Carmoty," he managed to say through puffed lips. "You should've stayed in the trenches where you had a good start digging a road to hell where you belong. You don't belong with white men, you—you—"

The Blaster laughed, a spine-tingling outburst. He stood there, massive, legs spread wide, arms folded across his chest. Carmoty, the self-confessed iconoclast, a typical son of Mars, a man whose dynamic personality absorbed that of each man near by.

"White men?" he blared out. "What good is color in this war, eh? What difference does it make whether you were brought up in an alley or in a hothouse? Maybe you were brought up in clover an' went to church every Sunday. Bah! The only mother I ever knew was a doorstep. That's where they found me. My name ain't even Carmoty, but I like it. I was tossed out on my ear when I was old enough to heat rivets. I don't know what I am, an' what's more, I don't give a damn. They gave me guts, that's all I know, see? Maybe I'm a Boche. Sometimes I wouldn't mind fightin' with the Germans. They're men. I've got wise to that. They can fly rings around most of you birds."

He laughed mirthlessly and spat on the ground. "But I'm on this side an' I git paid for killin' off the other side."

PILOTS shuffled away. A small group approached the mess bar. They mumbled under their breath and felt the need of a drink.

"I wish I had Gorham's nerve," said one. "An' Carmoty has the nerve to say he hasn't got guts!"

"But after he hit Carmoty," pointed out another, "he stood as if he were petrified. He didn't even stick up his hands. Three times now—" But how could these pilots know of that horrible power which seemed to lurk in Carmoty's savage eyes. They had not dared to look into them as had Gorham.

Carmoty snorted with disdain, left Gorham leaning against the wall, and strode to the bar with that swaggering gait of his. He smoothed the straight coal-black hair on his bullet-shaped head with splayed, powerful fingers. Every move of the man suggested power, savage ferocity.

"Get hopped up, buzzards," he advised. "Tomorrow we'll show Fritz Knecht and his Jaguars another brand of hell fire." He paused and reached for a jigger of brandy, downed it without a flutter of an eyelid and called hoarsely for another. His appetite for the strong drink whetted, he drew a sleeve across his mouth and turned away.

When he had gone, Reed walked slowly to the bar. Someone offered him a drink. He took the glass and held it to his lips. A grimace of pain screwed up his face as the liquor burned his bruised lips.

"Better stay away from Carmoty," one of the pilots suggested. "He's bad medicine. You can't reform a non-descript like that."

"Yes, I know," replied Gorham. "I know. He's even got Sandridge bluffed. The Blaster runs this outfit. God, how I hate the man! Those eyes of his—they probe into your brains and twist them like rubber." The tall flyer drew a deep breath, smiled thinly, and walked away.

Reed walked to squadron headquarters, where Sandridge was busy looking over a report. The C.O. scowled and looked up impatiently.

"Is it the same cry, Gorham?" he snapped. "Carmoty?"

"Yes, sir," answered the flyer. "We've got a bad name, sir. We're gentlemen, sir. All the other pilots feel as I do. A man likes to keep his self-respect even in the midst of a war. All over the front they call us the Cold Meat Squadron, Carmoty—"

"I've told you before to forget this silly nonsense," growled Sandridge, but it was plain that the man did not have the courage of his convictions. "In this bloody mess a man forgets," he rambled lamely. "I don't want you to bother me again, Gorham. Understand?"

"I do," snapped Gorham meaningly. "I do, sir."

Outside the Blaster was waiting. Great fingers toyed with a chain at his wrist. It was a strange trinket that the Blaster wore. A small chain with half a gold ring fastened to it. The ring had been sawed in zigzag fashion.

"Squawking again, Gorham?" he purred, lips curled sneeringly. "Not good enough for you white-livered swine, am I? Too tough. Well, damn your dirty soul to hell, I'll—"

Sandridge came out of headquarters. "That's enough from you, Carmoty," he

blazed. "I'll break the next man who uses a fist on another on this drome."

"Awright," responded the Blaster. "I'll git him some place else, major!"

Reed kept on walking, kept on until he found himself pushing through mist-soaked grass in the meadow beyond the field. There he waited, white of face, teeth set grimly. But the Blaster did not come.

Gorham wondered what would have happened if he had. He wondered if he would have overcome that deadly spell in the Blaster's eyes. Some day he would be able to—he knew it. And then he would beat the man to a pulp. He felt that Carmoty was a bully, a man protected by the very size of him. Thinking, Gorham grew calm, smoked a while, then returned to his hut.

THAT night the Peccaries speculated on what would happen in the next day's skies. Fritz Knecht and his Jaguars would be up, there was little doubt of that. The Jaguars! The jaguar is the most feared of all jungle beasts, but the Peccaries, those little piglike animals with sharp, razor-edged teeth, throw terror into the heart of the big cat.

The feud between the Jaguars and the Peccaries was a legend along the Front. The one increasing purpose in both Yankee and German dromes was to wipe the other out completely. And for weeks they had waged war with the odds about even. Fritz Knecht's prowess had been matched by the fury of Carmoty, the Blaster, and it was Carmoty every Junker wanted to down—Carmoty, the ruthless, who showed not a grain of mercy for a helpless pilot in front of his guns.

The Blaster swaggered to his King Camel midway between dawn and noon of the next day and wedged his huge frame into the narrow confines of the pit. The eight-to-ten patrol was going out, and Carmoty's eyes were hard, his lips twisted as he looked up into the cloudless, windless sky. He settled back, looked at the ships on either side, grimaced as he caught the helmeted profile of Gorham, three ships down the line.

Camels were roaring impatiently at the chocks, straining every strut and wire to get away. The Blaster's arm signaled to his mechanic. The prop spun over, shimmered, and brought forth a plethora of noise from the Camel's steel throat. Then the Blaster was away and the Peccaries jockeyed to position behind him as they roared toward Mount Sec.

Across the German back area Fritz Knecht herded his Jaguars, his keen eyes searching, searching into the haze in front of his prop boss. He peered overside to get his bearings, made out the town of St. Baussant, which appeared the size of a man's hand from the high altitude. He changed his course a bit, heading for Mount Sec, and several minutes later he saw the Peccaries.

They came swooping in with Carmoty, the Blaster, at the point of the wedge. Then they were scattering like quail flushed from the brush. Knecht shot a hand skyward and whirled it around. His Jaguars snarled and bared their fangs. The Peccaries leaped in, nipped at Knecht's sky beasts' flanks, skidded away, then came in to nip again.

Reed fought coolly, deliberately. There was not the fury in his attack that Carmoty was displaying all over the sky. In less than sixty seconds the Blaster had shot two Fokkers to bits. Gorham caught a glimpse of three others trying to pocket Carmoty as he threw his ship in a vertical bank and plunged into a cloud. Then he forgot the Blaster as one of the Jaguars came up under his Camel from below, hung on its prop a moment, and sent a stream of bullets through the fuselage.

Gorham winged over quickly as the Boche slipped away, and then he was looking straight into the Jaguar's pit. One brief flash of a panic-stricken white face, the pounding of his own guns. Gorham skidded away, knew that the job had been thorough. Up into the higher strata of conflict he went, to find Blaster Carmoty in a torrid mix-up with Knecht and two of his fellows.

Gorham grinned coldly as he sent one

lurching away with a well-aimed burst. They were after Carmoty, the Blaster—after him with a vengeance. But Gorham knew that the man was glorying in it. He thought he could hear the mad laughter and cursing of the Blaster as he gunned close to the leader's ship. Then Gorham drifted away again, half a mile away, as a Boche had singled him out and was striving desperately to get his prey in his sights.

Another Camel knifed in and burned the Fokker out. Two more Jaguars dropped down to even the score, and for hours the battle seemed to be prolonged. Eyes red-rimmed, Gorham slid to the fringe of the mêlée and swept the area with one lightning glance. The ships had thinned out, yet the odds still appeared even. And then Reed caught his breath as he saw Carmoty's ship slicing through the air across his line of flight. Behind him came Knecht, and another Fokker was sweeping in from right angles to cut the Blaster down. Carmoty's guns were silent. As Gorham bore in, he saw the giant pilot pounding at the crank handles of his guns with a huge fist.

Fritz Knecht's guns blazed before Gorham could bridge the gap. Carmoty's Camel shivered, seemed to stop dead for a second, then went staggering aloft. Two squadron ships joined Gorham and leaped for Knecht's ship. The Jaguars, however, sensing the kill, roared into that hectic corner of the sky. Around Carmoty the battle waged.

Gorham shot away the prop of one and just missed a head-on collision with Knecht as he threw his Camel down to cut him off from Carmoty's limping ship. The reckless dive went for naught. Carmoty was through. He was going down, fighting the controls on the way. Above the roar of the props Gorham thought he caught a strident roar of triumph.

The Peccaries backed away, stunned by the sight of that Camel going down, down behind the enemy lines, Fritz Knecht herding him down. Carmoty, of all men! Carmoty, the Blaster, was beaten. His ship was swallowed up by the low-hanging, fleecy ceiling. He was gone

from sight. The Boche waggled their wings derisively and headed for their drome.

THAT night on the Peccaries' field a faint ray of relief was apparent in the nimbus of gloom. True, Carmoty's going had deprived the Peccaries of their most dangerous offensive weapon against Knecht. Carmoty had thirty-six official victories in the air to his credit. Yet there was no longer that strange air of restraint among Sandridge's pilots. Their egos, long shackled by the Blaster's inexplicable spell, were manifesting themselves. Even Sandridge seemed lighter of step as he walked into the mess hall. For several minutes no one spoke. Sandridge finally broke the silence.

"It was a tough blow for us today," he said. "Carmoty had Knecht and his crowd a bit wary of us. The psychology of his being brought down promises us some days of hell." He caught Reed's glance and paused. "Oh, I know he wasn't a Sir Galahad," he went on, "but there is little room for that sort of stuff in these days. The Blaster—"

"I hope that Carmoty," said Gorham with a curl to his lips, "won't be able to fly again. With those Germans he likes so well—well, you never can tell about Carmoty. We've heard him talk, major. Some men are in military prisons for less. He wasn't fighting for any country. He was fighting because he liked to kill. You saw him with those two Boche the other day. It's like a man turning over a deer to show his friends what a Nimrod he is. I think we can carry on without Carmoty. Maybe we'll earn a better name than the Cold Meat Squadron."

"You're prejudiced, Gorham," said Sandridge testily. "Give the devil his due. It's easy to revile a man when he isn't here to defend himself. I might remind you that Carmoty might've died for his country. A dead man now—"

"What respect did he ever have for the dead?" interrupted Gorham bitterly. "And did you ever hear him say how much he loved his country? I've told him more than I'm telling you. We're

lucky. Something has been telling me—”

“That’s all, Gorham,” cracked Sandridge. “The book’s closed.”

The Peccaries carried on without the Blaster. If Fritz Knecht had expected their morale to crash with Carmoty, he was woefully disappointed. The Camel squadron seemed to challenge his right to superiority in the sky with greater fury than before. It went on for days, weeks, months. On the ground, the German tide was ready to surge forward. A successful offensive in the air was vital to the High Command. This last drive must not fail. *Herr Hauptmann* Fritz Knecht received his orders.

And then one night as the Peccaries were making merry in the mess shack, the door swung open with a bang, and on the threshold stood Blaster Carmoty. Carmoty in the flesh. He stood there in his old familiar posture, a smirk on his hard face. Arms folded over his chest, legs wide apart, he surveyed the Peccaries and laughed at them.

Dead silence reigned. Over the faces of stunned pilots swept that menial expression as they looked at the master. Reed cursed, half-rose from his chair, then slumped into it again.

“Hello, buzzards!” The words thundered through the mess shack.

No one spoke. It was the Blaster and no mistake. His voice seemed a little different, perhaps because there was a scar at one side of his mouth. There was another scar running from his right temple almost down to the jaw. From one white face to another strayed his mocking eyes. Finally they froze to Reed’s gaze of loathing. Carmoty’s lips twisted. His fingers curled, balled into fists and hung limply at his sides.

It seemed hours that he stood there, torturing the flyers. Not another word left his lips. Some one coughed nervously, and Carmoty laughed. Frayed nerves grew taut. Reed, eyes wild, seemed about to leap out of his chair to spring at the maddening giant figure when Carmoty deliberately turned his back and swaggered out into the night.

“Damn him!” Gorham cursed croakingly. “Damn him!”

ONCE more the drome of the Peccaries was dominated by Carmoty’s presence. The pilots lost their carefree mien, became trap-lipped. Into their eyes crept a hangdog expression. Reed, irritated by the sound of the Blaster’s piggish eating, got up from his chair and left the place. That night he sat for hours on his cot and stared at the wall, a strange glint in his eyes.

Led by Carmoty once more, the Peccaries went out the next day to fence with Fritz Knecht and his Jaguars. Once more the Blaster’s ship scourged the airplanes. He was all over the sky, guns beating out an incessant chant. The riveter at work again. The Boche reeled and pulled out after a brief skirmish. Evidently the return of Blaster Carmoty had shaken them up and robbed them of their lust for battle.

The Blaster led the Peccaries home, leaped from his Camel and swaggered over to squadron headquarters to make his report. Gorham watched that swaggering gait. Along his spine crawled invisible stinging fingers. His fist ached to smash into the man’s sneering face again.

The Blaster went out alone the next day. There was a savage gleam in his eyes as he took off. Pilots guessed that he was out gunning for the mighty Knecht, and each was thankful that he was not the Boche leader. An hour passed. Gorham and several other pilots were standing in the mottled shade cast by the great stretches of camouflage along the top of the hangars. The Peccaries’ drome was well screened from prying eyes above, insured against a possible raid from Boche bombers. Once, Knecht and his *Jagdstaffel* had appeared high in the sky five miles from the field, but they had been unable to definitely locate the Peccaries’ lair.

“It’s a wonder the Boche didn’t shoot him,” said one pilot casually. “Guess they used him pretty rough, though. If he meets Knecht alone, I’d like to see the—”

“I’d like to be Fritz Knecht,” rasped Reed. “I wish he had been a Boche, the—”

A shout welled up from out on the field. A mechanic was running around in circles, pointing up at the sky. Gorham ran out into the sunlight, looked aloft, then gasped. Gunning toward the field was a single ship. Spread out behind and high in the sky was a great cluster of black specks.

"Carmoty," shouted Gorham. "He's coming in. The Boche are chasing—"

Men ran wild. A siren screamed out. Sandridge came out of squadron headquarters and hurled orders right and left. The voices of men were drowned out as the thundering of the Mercedes chorus split the sky. The Jaguars were coming in, Carmoty but a step ahead of them.

"The dirty butcher!" howled Gorham as he ran to the hangar. "He's leading 'em right in. The louse! The—" He ducked for cover.

It was too late to reach the ships. Already the Boche were diving on the drome. A machine gun mounted on a big cartwheel in the center of the field began to spit. Archie fire from a battery a mile away began to tear at the ether around Knecht's raiders. Bullets sprayed the tarmac. Into underground shelters the pilots crowded.

Carmoty's Camel lurched across the tarmac. The Blaster's huge fist flailed at the Fokkers as he cut the switch and rolled in. For hours, it seemed the strafing went on, yet it only consumed a few minutes. Knecht's Jaguars unloaded their bombs and machine gun clips and then swept away, their Mercedes engines shrieking a triumphant, spiteful dirge.

THE cursing Peccaries came out into the open and stared at the havoc which had been wrought. Groundsmen were frantically fighting a fire that licked at a hangar and its camouflaged screen. Two Camels were washed out. The field was pocked by machine-gun bursts. Near the gun in the middle of the field two shapeless heaps were glaringly apparent. Carmoty, the Blaster, shouting and cursing at the disappearing Boche, almost bumped into Gorham. The tall pilot spun him around.

"I knew you were a dirty rotten traitor," he spat into the Blaster's face. "Led the Boche right here, didn't you? "Led 'em right here to save your rotten skin or else—"

Men drifted over, faces grim.

Carmoty said nothing. He whipped off his helmet. A cold smile on his lips, he stepped toward his enemy.

Reed smashed his fist home. Carmoty rocked on his heels. Gorham looked into the Blaster's eyes and received a terrific shock. They no longer blazed with that awesome hypnotic light. Gone was that power to wring the strength from Gorham's every fibre. A wild, exultant yell burst from his lips as Carmoty lunged to the attack. The man's fist crashed against the side of Gorham's jaw. The latter shook his head and bore in. Two sledge-hammer blows landed on the Blaster's face. Relentlessly, he followed them up.

Sanity snapping, Reed hurled himself against his hated adversary. Those eyes of Carmoty's—what had changed them? Smash! Smash! The Blaster's eyes were clouded with stark desperation, the semblance of fear. They held no terror now for Reed. Their mesmeric power was gone.

"Come on, butcher!" ripped out Gorham. "Come on!"

Smash, smash! A wild yell rose from the field. Carmoty's great limbs were wobbling. He held his hands up to his face. Gorham beat them away. Another terrific punch sent the Blaster to his knees. Slowly he staggered erect. Then he was sprawled out on the dirt, a sodden, gory hulk.

Reed laughed crazily, looked down at Carmoty, then turned his gaze to his own bruised knuckles. Tears of hysteria rolled down his white cheeks. He had beaten the Blaster, knocked him senseless. The other pilots half-carried, half-dragged Carmoty to his quarters.

"Blast him!" ripped out the beaten man. "H-he beat me. For this I'll kill that Gorham!" He turned his wrathful, red-rimmed eyes on the flyers, half rising from his chair. They went out and left him alone.

Out on the field Gorham still stood where he had dropped Carmoty. He held something in the hollow of his hand, something he had picked out of the dirt. The little chain which the Blaster had worn at his wrist, the chain to which was attached one half of a wedding ring. He studied it curiously for a while, then dropped it into his pocket and walked slowly to his hut. Once before, Carmoty had lost that trinket, and had almost turned the drome upside down in his eagerness to retrieve it.

Late that night Gorham happened to pass the operations shack. The small window was partly open, and through it came Carmoty's staccato voice.

"If I were myself," he was saying, "I would have broken the rat to pieces with one hand. The food in prison camp—look at my face, major. It was almost pulp when they picked me up. A spy, they call me—blast it! You hear—I know where Fritz Knecht's drome is. Tomorrow at dawn—"

"There are no charges against you," came Sandridge's voice. "Gorham lost his head. Tomorrow, Carmoty, we will blast Captain Knecht out of the war. Those are my orders, Carmoty. You lead the Peccaries over! Every man—every ship. Now we've ferreted him out. I've buzzed the Wing—everything is ready."

Gorham's lips were tight pressed as he walked on. Another pilot fell into step with him.

"What a beatin' you gave that big gorilla!" enthused the man.

"I wonder," was Gorham's cryptic reply.

Still later Gorham made his way to Carmoty's quarters. In answer to his knock came a petulant growl. Gorham opened the door and walked inside. Face livid, Carmoty leaped to his feet.

"You lost something out there," explained Reed, and he pulled the trinket from his pocket. "Thought you'd want it, Carmoty."

"Oh, yes," said the Blaster, "yes." He snatched it from Gorham's hand. "Thanks," he said caustically. "Now get out."

Gorham grimaced as he obeyed.

THREE-THIRTY! Every Camel and every pilot on the Peccaries' drome were ready for the air. Gorham, walking across the field, could not take his eyes off Carmoty's ship, the King Camel with the long black streamers trailing on the ground.

Sandridge was pacing up and down near the line of ships. Groundsmen hurried to and fro in the early morning mists, tightening wires, taking last looks at guns and motors. Props spun, died again.

Out of the mess shack came Carmoty, wiping his mouth with his sleeve. He pulled on his helmet, looked at his watch, then up at the sky. Gorham's every muscle was rigid as he watched Carmoty come up to the line. Carmoty and Sandridge drew together for last-minute instructions. Shivering, lips dry, Gorham walked to his ship and climbed into the pit. His hands shook as he fumbled with the controls. His heart pounded with the gargantuan roar of the Camels.

Carmoty was in his pit now. Gorham saw his hand go up. The prop of the Camel spun, and the mechanic slipped back through the line. Carmoty rolled away, black pennons dragging through the dirt. One by one the Peccaries followed. Sandridge, pulling slowly at his pipe, watched the ships soar. At three thousand feet they were barely visible in the dawn mist. Suddenly the squadron commander's pipe fell from his teeth. Out of the sky came the clatter of machine guns.

Gorham, as the Camels reached three thousand, gritted his teeth, hurled his ship aloft, gave it full gun and roared over Carmoty. The Blaster looked up, swore crazily and jerked back the stick. The rest of the squadron froze in their seats as Gorham poured a stream of lead into Carmoty's Camel. The Blaster lurched drunkenly, slipped down a thousand feet, then recovered.

Apparently gone mad, Gorham hurled his ship down and let the guns blaze. Horror-stricken pilots saw Carmoty thresh in his pit, try to stop the down-

ward plunge of his Camel. As he zoomed, Gorham waved frantically to the other pilots. His finger stabbed toward the drome. Then he was slipping down again after Carmoty's wobbling ship.

The Blaster yanked the Camel's nose up, hung in the sky for a breathless second and tripped his guns at Gorham. Lead streamed back at him, cut through the pit. The Blaster's head slumped down. One hand clawed convulsively at the sky. The Camel spun down, and Gorham swooped low as it crashed. Again he swept an arm toward the drome, and shook his fist at the pilots aloft.

Shaken to their very souls, the Pecaries reformed and headed back to the field. Carmoty alone had known the lair of the Jaguars. Carmoty was gone—shot down by Gorham!

Cross-country Sandridge was racing in a squadron motorcycle. Head tilted back in the lurching side-car, he kept his eyes glued to the skies. He made out the squadron ships circling wildly, but there was no evidence of Boche planes in the sky. Then his stomach turned over. He saw a Camel spinning earthward, with two pennons licking out from the tail. Carmoty!

Sandridge cursed, raved at the driver to get more speed out of the motorcycle, and gripped the sides of the car until his knuckles shone white. The ship was gone now—crashed. Another Camel was swooping low.

Five more minutes, and Sandridge was speeding through the wreck of a town filled with infantry. Somebody yelled at him and stabbed a finger toward a divergent road. The motorcycle skidded into it and raced on until Sandridge spotted the wreck of a machine in a field some distance ahead. Yankee infantrymen jumped aside as the motorcycle hurtled along.

GORHAM was bending over a limp hulk as men ran up. The flyer turned a stony face toward them and motioned for silence. The man on the grass was moving. Words were issuing tremulously from his lips.

"So," and the face grimaced with pain, "you knew, did you—Gorham?"

"I was pretty sure," replied Gorham. "I—" A hand dropped to his shoulder and twisted him about.

"Gorham," cracked out his squadron commander, "you've killed Carmoty! What in the name of—"

The man on the grass essayed a thin laugh. "H'lo, major," he managed. "*Wie Gehts!* Gorham is very observing, *ja?*"

Sandridge gasped and his eyes bulged. He looked close. "Then you're a German, Carmoty? You—"

"Yes," answered Gorham for the injured man, "he's German—but this isn't the Carmoty we knew. This, major, is *Herr Hauptmann Fritz Knecht!*"

Sandridge made an attempt to speak. Gorham interrupted.

"That trinket Carmoty wore with half a wedding ring—you remember? There was another half. It was only logical for me to think so, wasn't it? Carmoty said he had no mother but a doorstep. He—"

"No, I don't see," snapped Sandridge. "Carmoty—"

"When I licked Fritz Knecht here," interposed Gorham, "I knew. There is not the same look in two men's eyes. I could not have licked Carmoty in a million years. Those eyes of his when he goes half crazy! If you had only looked into them once, major! And when Knecht lost that trinket, he did not seem very anxious to look for it. I figured that it had already served its purpose. You know he kept to himself a lot, didn't say much—"

"Clever, Gorham," Knecht managed to inject, struggling painfully to rise up on one elbow. "You are right. Carmoty was my brother. He had the other half of the ring. On different doorsteps we were left, you see. *Ja?* I was taken by a German family, and soon they went back to Germany. I became a German, *ja*. Carmoty, he became an Irishman. That is strange, *nein?*" He paused, bit back a cry of pain, then resumed.

"Never will they make a German out of Carmoty. But I talk with him. I watch him for weeks. I know his every trait,

ape his walk—his voice. He does not know why, ha! Like two peas in a pod are we, me *und* Carmoty. Always he talks about *Leutnant* Gorham until I get to know Gorham even before I see him. *Ach*, he must have liked you, Gorham.”

“Then Carmoty didn’t—” choked Reed Gorham, a strange surge of elation welling up within him. “But how did you know where the drome was?”

“What, *Leutnant*?” questioned Fritz Knecht vaguely, pain-ridden. “Ah, Carmoty told me you were very clever, ha! In a Spad—with Carmoty’s uniform? I landed on an *Amerikaner* drome—asked the way.”

“You planned everything down to the minutest detail, didn’t you?” put in Sandridge, reluctant admiration interspersed with wrath.

“I led the Jaguars here. They knew my signal, *ja*. The next day it was planned to set a trap. One hundred Boche ships to pounce on the *verdammte* Peccaries when I led them over,” said the German, after a pause to gain strength. “But too confident I was. Well,

the fortunes of war, eh, major?” He groaned and fell back.

“Better get him out of here,” barked Sandridge to the gaping infantrymen. “He’s lost a lot of blood. Too bad he lives. A firing squad for a man who almost leads a squadron to slaughter—”

Fritz Knecht smiled with effort. Then a convulsion seized him. His face grayed and a trickle of blood oozed from his mouth. “I waited—to clear—my brother—Carmoty. That is—all. *Auf weid*—” The words died out.

“Good work, Gorham,” said Sandridge huskily. “You seemed to be wrong about the Blaster. Carmoty—”

“I’ve been a damn fool,” interrupted Gorham shortly. “From now on I’ll show these birds here what guts are. With Carmoty gone, somebody’s got to do it.” He bent over the dead man and unfastened the trinket from his wrist. Suddenly he stopped, thought a moment, then made it tight again.

“I’ll leave it there,” he said quietly. “Some day it might serve its purpose again.”



New BC-2 Delivered To Air Corps

THE Assistant Secretary of War announced recently that the first of three BC-2 Basic Combat airplanes, built by North American Aviation, Inc., of Inglewood, Calif., has been delivered to the Army Air Corps at Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio.

The BC-2 is a single-engined low-wing monoplane, powered with a Pratt & Whitney engine which drives a three-bladed propeller. The crew consists of a pilot and gunner-observer. Approximate wing span is 43 feet, length 23 feet. Wings are of all-metal construction, and the fuselage is completely built up of tubular steel, fabric covered. Armament consists of two machine guns, one fixed firing forward, and one flexible, mounted in the rear cockpit.

Basic Combat ships are training planes that were made necessary by the high performance of modern pursuit airplanes, and are used as a step up between the Basic Trainer, which the Flying Cadets use at Randolph Field, and the fighters with which the tactical units are provided. Also, Basic Combat planes are provided with all of the various instruments, controls, and other “gadgets” which pilots are required to use on first line military airplanes. So by utilizing a plane of the BC type, students have the opportunity of receiving instruction in the proper manipulation and utilization of all the equipment of a modern ship while the actual flying costs the War Department only from one-third to one-half as much.

The World War's Greatest Airmen

<i>Name</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Victories</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Victories</i>
Manfred von Richthofen	Germany	80	Karl Bolle	Germany	36
Rene Fonck	France	75	Max Mueller	Germany	36
Edward Mannock	England	73	Julius Buckler	Germany	35
William Bishop	Canada	72	Gustave Doerr	Germany	35
Raymond Collishaw	Canada	68	Edward von Schleich	Germany	35
Ernst Udet	Germany	62	Maurice Boyau	France	35
James McCudden	England	58	Henry W. Wollett	England	35
Erich Lowenhardt	Germany	56	Frank G. Quigley	Canada	34
Donald McLaren	Canada	54	Frank R. McCall	Canada	34
William Barker	Canada	53	Lieutenant Coeffard	France	34
Phillip F. Fullard	England	53	Willy Coppens	Belgium	34
Georges Guynemer	France	53	Capt. Brunowsky	Austria	34
A. W. B. Proctor	England	52	Francesco Baracca	Italy	34
Werner Voss	Germany	48	Josef Veltjens	Germany	34
Robert A. Little	New Zealand	47	Otto Koennecke	Germany	33
G. E. H. McElroy	Canada	46	Kurt Wolff	Germany	33
Charles Nungesser	France	45	Heinrich Bongarth	Germany	33
Bruno Loerzer	Germany	45	Herman Frommhertz	Germany	33
Rudolf Berthold	Germany	44	Emil Thuy	Germany	32
Paul Baeumer	Germany	43	Paul Billik	Germany	31
Josef Jacobs	Germany	43	Albert D. Carter	Canada	31
Albert Ball	England	43	J. L. M. White	Canada	31
Captain Larkin	England	41	W. L. Jordan	England	31
George Madon	France	41	Captain Hazel	Australia	31
Oswald Boelcke	Germany	40	M. B. Frew	England	30
Franz Bucmer	Germany	40	Cedric E. Howell	England	30
Lothar von Richthofen	Germany	40	Andrew McKeever	Canada	30
Ira T. Jones	England	40	Captain Kinhead	England	30
Roderic Dallas	New Zealand	39	Karl Allmenroeder	Germany	30
Karl Menckhoff	Germany	39	Karl Degelow	Germany	30
Heinrich Gontermann	Germany	39	Josef Mai	Germany	30
John Gilmore	New Zealand	37	Ulrich Neckel	Germany	30
W. G. Claxton	Canada	37	Karl Schaefer	Germany	30

Leading American Aces

<i>Name</i>	<i>Squadron</i>	<i>Victories</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Squadron</i>	<i>Victories</i>
Edward V. Rickenbacker	94	25	Reed G. Landis	25	10
Frank Luke	27	18	Jacques M. Swaab	22	10
George Vaughn	17	13	Lloyd A. Hamilton	17	9
Field E. Kindley	148	12	Frank Hunter	103	9
Elliot W. Springs	148	12	Chester E. Wright	93	9
David E. Putnam	139	10	Paul F. Baer	103	9

More Spads joined the battle, and the Fokkers made one last attack before retreating!



Aces Are Taboo!

By J. D. ROGERS, JR.

Author of "Shells of Treachery" and "Birdman's Bluff"

IF those questioning the delay in the much discussed American offensive could have been present when the 19th's flyers limped in from bombing escort duty, they would have received an

unspoken answer to their provoking demands. Warily, as one by one they stumbled into the dirty, depressing light of the long recreation hall, the pilots' faces reflected the truth. To every eye their

There was an invisible deadline around the Grand Imperial—that German bridge over which food for hungry guns was brought. No Allied plane could fly within ten miles of it, and no Boche could even enter that forbidden area. Yet there was one Kiwi Yank who dared to defy that deadline—after he had been branded as a coward for fearing it!

★ ★ ★

entire beings cried out of failure—miserable failure.

Singly, their lips compressed into hard straight lines, their eyes still focused upon the past hour of hell, they crossed the room, halted mechanically before the improvised bar, downed with a gulp the tumblers of liquor thrust before them, then stumbled on to bed and solitude. Never a gesture, never a word, never a glance to see who had not returned. Only a silence that was grim and terrible—a silence that became an awe-inspiring tale-bearer of an escort whose bombers had failed to reach their goal.

Standing in the center of the low-ceilinged room, clinging to a post as if dependent upon its support for stability, a sandy-haired youth of hardly seventeen directed a hopeful, almost pleading look upon the face of every pilot who staggered into the light of the interior. As man after man appeared in the doorway, passed on to the bar and bed, a nervousness seemed to assail the lad, a fearful anxiety to creep into his demeanor.

"Brad!" his lips whispered softly, a sob choking in his throat. "They didn't get you. They couldn't. They couldn't!"

Then suddenly he seemed to quiver all over, his eyes to beam, his entire being to be elevated from the realms of dark despair. With a muffled exclamation he leaped forward.

"Brad!"

"'Lo, kid."

The stocky, grime-besmeared veteran who had just appeared out of the night placed his arm affectionately about the lad's shoulders and led him across the room. Together they mounted the stairs that led to the second floor.

In a small room upstairs the returned flyer struck a match and applied the

flame to a candle stuck in a saucer. In the eerie light that flickered forth, he stretched wearily, yawned prodigiously, then began to throw off flying clothes. Across the room, the Kid lavished a hero-worshipping gaze upon him.

"Gee, Brad. I thought they had got you," suddenly blurted the youngster with a note of relief in his voice.

"Nope, Kid," responded Brad with a shrug. "Just wasn't my time, though for a few minutes it was mighty hot. The Jerries are wise to every move we make. They had a nice little trap waiting for us just outside of Spriel."

"Many downed?" quickly asked the Kid.

"Three Handleys and a couple of the British escort planes," replied Brad, now down to his flying boots. "As for our outfit, there'll be three or four empty chairs at mess in the morning."

"God!" exclaimed the Kid. "Why doesn't Headquarters give up the job? Since they spotted that bridge, at least fifty flyers have g one West!"

"And before they destroy it, several times fifty will go," echoed Brad.

The Kid did not reply immediately. Instead, he leaned over the table and gazed down upon the map that was a permanent fixture there. His eyes found and focused upon a circle-enclosed point some forty miles behind the German lines. It was the Grand Imperial, that massive structure of iron and steel whose spans bridged the broad Rhine. A vitally important link it was in the great railroad system that connected Germany's munitions factories with her thundering guns—those ever hungry monsters of destruction.

BRAD, now clothed in a pair of wrinkled pajamas, walked over to the table. Leaning over the Kid's shoulder,

he placed the point of his finger upon the circle-enclosed point. "Destroy that bridge and you end a war," he quoted. "Headquarters issued that statement last week, while defending its sacrifice of flyers' lives. They said that Germany would immediately yell for an Armistice if the Grand Imperial was totally destroyed."

"But how could one bridge be so important?" protested the Kid.

In response, Brad's finger touched the great railhead at Yerkers. Then it touched another twenty miles away at Brusbane, then still another, thirty miles farther south and located at Lerona. Then slowly his finger traced the feeder lines to those great, well-known railheads. In each case his finger's course led back and across the Grand Imperial.

The unspoken answer to the Kid's impulsive question was a revelation. The bridge was the one remaining gateway from Germany's munitions factories to her ammunition dumps. Destroy that gateway and you cut off the food supply from the monster guns upon which Germany was now depending to repulse the impending American offensive. Destroy that bridge and you starved the iron demons waiting to belch forth death and destruction upon the thousands of dough-boys even now massed in the trenches, fretting to be loosed toward the Boche in the trenches opposite them.

"God!" whispered the Kid. "There should be a way!"

"And there might have been," returned Brad, "had the Germans not realized the value of the bridge long before the Allies did. There's nothing they've overlooked in providing for its safety."

"I have it!" exulted the Kid. "Why not use captured Gothas to bomb it?"

"Checked on your first move, old fellow," answered the veteran flyer. "The Jerries thought of that, too. As a result, they restrict all flying to within ten miles of the bridge. If a plane, even though it bore German markings, were to enter that forbidden area, it would be promptly shot down."

"But there must be some way!" protested the Kid.

"Granted," returned Brad with another and wider yawn. "But while you're studying it out, I'm going to get a little shut-eye. However, in your figuring, don't overlook the fact that the Grand Imperial is four tracks wide. That it would take several tons of our highest explosives to destroy it. That German pursuit planes on ten fields surrounding the forbidden area are always ready for a take-off to intercept invaders from any direction. And last, that ammunition trains halt before crossing and are subjected to a thorough search for time bombs that might have been secreted among the cars by Allied agents."

With that speech, the weary flyer stumbled over and crawled into his bunk. As he pulled the blanket about him, he ventured one last piece of advice. "Better stick to your cameras, Kid," he offered. "You were sent up here because you had a natural eye for distance. You can get pictures of enemy positions that make generals sit up and take notice. Stick to your game, and leave fighting to soldiers."

A fringe of color crept to the edges of the youth's cheeks. For a moment he hesitated, then he revolted.

"Kid!" he burst with a touch of derisive anger in his voice. "Always 'Kid!' I hear it on the field, hear it in the hangars, hear it in the mess hall. I'm damned tired of it! Tired of cameras, too! I want to fight. That's why I ran away from school and lied my way into the service. I can fly. I can shoot. Perhaps I'm not good enough for a one-seater, but I can swing the hell out of a gun in a rear cockpit! Oh, Brad—" the voice changed abruptly to a pleading, almost childish sincerity—"you've been like a big brother all along. You've piloted me ever since I came up. You know I can swing a gun. Get the C.O. to put me in a two-seater. It may be hell out there fighting, but it's worse than hell waiting day after day to see who'll come back."

The war-wise Brad raised up on an elbow. Surprise showed on his tired face. "Listen, Kid," he coaxed. "The war in the sky has just started. During the

next month, flyers are going to be knocked down like flies. Mike'll go—Spud'll go—I'll go. And why not? Why hurl thousands of soldiers into sure slaughter when the lives of a few hundred flyers might pave another and safer way? No, Kid. Stick to your cameras. You're too young to die."

With a meaning shake of his head, Brad lay back slowly and pulled the blanket up about his neck.

FOR a moment the Kid held his ground. His arms waved in wasted gestures. His lips moved, too, but no words ensued. He could think of no advancing argument. With a sigh of resignation he dropped into the chair by the table.

"Mike'll go—Spud'll go—I'll go." The words echoed over and over in the youth's ears as if rebounding from some inward emotion. Three men. Three men of flesh and blood and bone. Three men who he watched go out daily, and looked for to return. They would die, would pass into physical oblivion—and they were only examples of hundreds of others.

"No!" groaned the Kid with youthful compassion. "There must be a way."

His eyes turned back to the table. His gaze centered upon that circle-enclosed spot nestling sinisterly there upon the Rhine. His mind leaped out through space, fled deep into Germany, and high above the Grand Imperial hovered, looked down, searched diligently for some vulnerable spot.

For a long time the boy sat there in concentrated thought. Once, twice, a hundred times he reviewed the obstacles Brad had reminded him of. Then suddenly he tensed, his eyes flashing. One of those obstacles had presented a solution, a solution to a means of destruction. Mike, Spud, Brad—they would not have to die. Those hundreds of others would not have to die, either!

The next moment he was on his feet. "Brad! Brad!" he shouted joyously. "I have it! I have it!"

The slumbering flyer jumped startlingly to a sitting position, gazed stupidly at

the excited youth for a minute, then sank back again. "Go to bed, Kid," he grunted. "Sleep it off."

"Kid"—there it was again—a symbol of his youth, a reflection on his capacity to think and to act. Well, he'd show them. The excitement died in his eyes. A surge of determination caused his chin to protrude belligerently. He opened the door, passed down the stairs and out into the night. Ignoring the challenge of a groundman, he crossed the field and unceremoniously entered a shack that nestled between two hangars.

With a series of rough shakes, the Kid aroused Sandy, the chief mechanic of the 19th Squadron.

"It's me, Sandy—the Kid," he whispered in response to the Swede's gruff demands. "I've got great news. Do you hear?"

It took about two minutes for the youngster to pour his plans into the large weatherbeaten ears of the chief mechanic. And there must have been something logical about those plans, for Sandy permitted him to talk on. When the job was done, the Kid asked anxiously:

"How does it sound, Sandy?"

"Aye tank you bane crazy, Kid," growled the good-natured Swede.

"Then you'll help!" exclaimed the Kid, joyously. "I knew you would. We'll start tomorrow. A few days should do the job."

He pushed the heavy-eyed mechanic back in bed, bounced a couple of mock punches off his chest, then escaped hurriedly from the shack. A jaunty *estaminet* air shrilled through his teeth as he recrossed the tarmac to the farmhouse barracks.

THE light of another day found the Kid not one whit less enthusiastic about his mad plans. There was a spring in his step, a tune on his lips when he came down to breakfast. But that tune died abruptly, and a curious look spread over the Kid's features as he crossed the threshold of the mess hall. He halted, then remembered with a sickening sensation. Four empty chairs cried out the

cause of the solemnity that held sway over the inmates of the room.

Spud McCoy, a veteran flyer who had never displayed any signs of human emotions, glanced across at the Kid and, catching his eye, nodded towards the empty chairs.

"Still want to fly a Spad, Kid?" he asked in a cold voice.

For a moment the Kid did not reply. He just stood and glared at his tormentor.

"Hell, no!" he burst out. "Not with blockheads like you who try to do everything by force. If I were flying a Spad, I'd show you birds something. I'd lay an egg right in the middle of the damned bridge!"

"Ah! A young David in our midst," scoffed Spud. "Aces are now taboo, or I'm a Kiwi!"

"Lay off the Kid!" rasped Brad's voice from across the table. "How many more times have I got to tell you that Spud?"

"Enough!" barked a commanding voice from the head of the table. "We're up here to fight Jerries, not to quarrel among ourselves."

With that, Major Burton turned his gaze upon the Kid. "Jackson," he spoke in a reproving voice, "I think your outburst had a touch of disrespect for those men." And he nodded towards the empty chairs. "The Grand Imperial is all that it's cracked up to be. It's all that and more, too. It's the most carefully watched and best protected military project on the continent. Any man who places a bomb on its spans has my permission to remove this." As an accompanying gesture to that speech, Major Burton's finger tapped the medal ribbon that had not been removed from his tunic since General Foch pinned it there six months before.

"And he'll be damned deserving of it and plenty more!" that officer added emphatically.

"I'm sorry, sir," the Kid offered apologetically. "Disrespect was not in my mind. I guess it's the inactivity, sir. Hanging around day after day. Watching men go out to fight. Seeing some of

them return. It's getting me. I want to go out there with them. I want to fight. I can swing a gun. Brad'll vouch for that. Don't you think, sir—"

"Hold on, Jackson! Hold on!" The major's hand was up in a restraining gesture. "You were sent up here to take photographs. Remember, your services are as valuable to the cause as are those of us who fly and fight. It's your extreme youth that prevents you from seeing glory in your work. Snap out of it, old fellow. This isn't a one-man war."

"It might not be a one-man war," blurted the Kid boldly, "but I have a plan by which one man could destroy the Grand Imperial!"

In response to the roar of laughter that greeted his statement, the Kid leaped angrily to his feet, hurled an uncomplimentary retort into the faces of the merciless flyers, then strode from the room. Gone was the sacrificial motivation. Gone, also, was the deed for its military worth. An overwhelming desire for revenge assailed his emotions. He'd show them. He'd wipe those tormenting smiles from their faces.

The Kid stopped dead in his tracks, and a slow, pleased smile spread over his face. In his imagination he was boldly removing the *Croix de Guerre* ribbon from Major Burton's tunic.

As if that thought were an added impetus, the Kid directed his footsteps towards the squadron workshop. Sandy would be there, and Sandy had consented to help.

The Kid was not disappointed in his expectations. The big Swede, though skeptical, admitted that there were possibilities in the youth's rash plans.

"Which ship you bane use?" he asked in his broken English.

"The Special," answered the Kid. "It's light and fast. I want to come back after the job's done. Being a martyr doesn't somehow appeal to me."

The mechanic greeted the words with a wry face. "Aye bane get the guardhouse for one big fool Aye be," he grumbled, at the same time reaching for the drawings the Kid produced. Then, as if

instantly and completely forgetting the irregularity of the job, Sandy dived whole-heartedly into the plans.

FOUR days later, though they had been permitted to work only in snatches, the two conspirators had as a result of their labor, two long, narrow frameworks made of light spruce wood salvaged from discarded wings.

"They're perfect!" exulted the Kid as he stepped back and surveyed them. "Now to canvas them and sling on the dope."

"And then what'll they be, Kid?"

The Kid whirled around as if attacked. The C.O.'s orderly was standing there, wearing a smile that hinted of unspoken suspicions.

"What do they look as if they'll be?" snorted the Kid with feigned disgust, while in his brain he was pleading frantically for a satisfactory explanation.

"Can't just say," replied the orderly. "Guess I'll wait and see what they look like after they're finished."

"Well, you won't have to wait that long," blurted the Kid as a sudden, glorious impulse struck his brain. "They're an idea of mine. Camera boxes. When they're finished, I'm going to get some of the damndest pictures Headquarters ever hoped to see."

"Then you'll need a Handley-Page to carry them around in," shrugged the non-com, with a dubious look in his eyes. "But you'll be needing them. Major Burton's been yelling for you. There are big doings on or I miss a guess."

The Kid winked warningly at Sandy, then followed the orderly across the tarmac. To his surprise he found most of the squadron's flyers grouped in the recreation quarters. Though this in itself was unusual, it was the look on the men's faces that caused him to glance about for an explanation. Seeing his roommate across the hall, he strode over and asked, "What's up, Brad?"

"Plenty!" growled the stocky pilot. "Just what I was warning you about a few nights back. The 19th's been invited to join the Suicide Expedition. They're going after the Grand Imperial in a big

way." There was a touch of irony in the flyer's voice that found a sympathetic reflection in the eyes of every pilot present.

"What do you mean?" pressed the Kid. "Suicide Expedition?"

"See the C.O.," responded Brad. "He's been looking for you. He'll shoot you the works."

The Kid turned, crossed the room hurriedly, then passed through a door into the privacy of Major Burton's office. Inside the room he halted, for the pall of gloom hanging over the hall he had just quitted seemed light compared to the cloud hovering upon the C.O.'s brow.

"You sent for me, sir?" he asked.

The C.O.'s eyes turned upon the Kid but did not focus there. "It isn't fair!" he muttered with feeling in his voice. "It's murder! God! Why do they make me send men to their destruction?"

"You sent for me, sir?" Again the Kid addressed the wretched Commanding Officer. This time the words found their mark, shattering the stupor that held the man. For the first time he seemed really aware of the Kid's presence.

"Oh, yes, Jackson. Oh, yes." For a moment the major shuffled papers in an obvious effort to regain his composure. Then he began in a military manner.

"Starting tomorrow, Headquarters wants pictures made daily of enemy back areas. We've been assigned the sector directly in front of us and extending fifteen miles into German air."

"Whew!" whistled the squadron camera man. "What is it, sir—an advance?"

The major nodded. "It's an advance," he grated with a touch of hard irony in his voice, "but not the kind you're thinking of. It's an air attack, a 'Suicide Expedition.' All available aircraft are to be assembled in this sector. At the word, a massed attack is to be made upon the Grand Imperial."

"But such a thing would be obvious," blurted the Kid impulsively. "Concentration of planes in this sector would be the same as informing the enemy of our intentions."

The major stared at the Kid for a moment, then shook his head and shrugged,

as if making allowance for his youth. "And why do you think I just branded the affair a Suicide Expedition?" he bit off sarcastically.

"Sorry," stammered the Kid. "But do you really think Headquarters will go through with it, sir?"

"Think!" burst the miserable C.O. "I know damned well they will! Those swivel-chair soldiers will do anything to blast the Grand Imperial off the map. Haven't they already sent fifty men and nearly as many ships to their doom? Yes, and now they're going to hurl whole squadrons at the bridge—and going to warn the enemy beforehand, mind you. It's suicide, I tell you!"

The Kid reeled under the major's gruesome prophecy. His head whirled, and a sensation of maddening helplessness began to creep over him. The Grand Imperial was not just a bridge, not just a strategic piece of engineering. It was a beast—a mechanical beast whose magnetism, like invisible tentacles, was slowly drawing into its awful maw Allied ships and Allied flyers. How had he ever dreamed of destroying such a demon single-handed? Had he been mad? Were the flyers right? Was he just a kid, a youth too young in years to think and plan?

No! The Kid's reason suddenly rebelled against the thoughts. He wasn't too young to think! A savage resolve to act and to succeed flooded through his veins. Yes, he'd go through with those desperate plans. He'd destroy that monster of steel. He'd save Brad and Spud and Mike, and those hundreds of others from their impending doom.

"I'll go and prepare my cameras, sir. At any moment needed, I'll be at your service."

The major noted that new quality in the Kid's voice.

"You make your first trip tomorrow morning, one hour after dawn," he announced. "Brad, as usual, will pilot you!"

"There will be protection?" questioned the Kid.

"Two flights," replied the major. "One flight hanging two thousand feet above you, the other three thousand feet higher

up. Incidentally, I'd like to discuss the plans with Captain Bradford. You may send him in as you go out."

In the hall outside, the Kid slanted his thumb towards the room he had just quitted, and nodded to Brad. "You're next," he said.

THEN, with a haste which the intent of polishing camera lenses could not possibly have induced in him, the Kid left the quarters and strode across the tarmac. His course led to the squadron workshop. Sandy would be there, and the Kid had plenty of news for that big Swede's ears.

And Sandy listened as he always did to the Kid. When he had heard the whole story, he shook his head and repeated slowly, reflectively, "Suicide Expedition."

A faraway look crept into the Swede's eyes. The Kid knew that Sandy was seeing Allied planes plunging earthward, firebrands tossed from a flaming sky.

The Kid blotted out the gruesome reflection. "It mustn't be, Sandy. It can't be! We've got to prevent it!"

The Swede's arm went around the Kid. A broad, calloused hand patted the youth's shoulder in a manner that made words unnecessary.

That gesture settled it. New strength surged into the Kid's veins. There was only one thing to fear now. Would there be time?

That fear was agitated during the succeeding days by the rapidity with which Allied preparations for the expedition and counter-preparations by the Germans were pushed forward. From the sky, the Kid saw that activity progress like magic, saw every prospective flying field within a radius of twenty miles become an Allied drome. But for every one of those he saw established, he saw two spring up on the other side of No-Man's-Land.

Nor did the Germans try to hide the fact. Instead, they displayed their defensive preparations with a boldness that was arrogantly defiant. They even permitted Allied observation planes to wing their respective ways unmolested,

and let those planes take pictures and haul their films back across the lines. There was a fox within the enemy ranks, and with Prussian cunning he was aiming at the tottering morale of the Allied flyers.

Day after day, the Kid went into the air and took his quota of films. In the rear cockpit of a lumbering Salmson, piloted by Brad and watched over by two flights of protecting Spads, he looked down upon the bare fields, saw those fields sprout metal frameworks, and in turn saw those skeletons blossom into canvas-covered hangars. He even caught glimpses of German Archie crews lingering idly about their silent guns, staring up, seemingly amused by the circular-marked visitors.

After each of those excursions, ominous in their peacefulness, the Kid climbed down from his cockpit with a greater respect for the scheme he had planned drumming in his breast. Dismounting cameras, he would hurry to his makeshift laboratory and there rush through the developing process. Then he would join Sandy, and at every opportunity that offered secrecy, the two of them would add to their own preparations.

At the end of nine days, though it seemed like a century to the Kid, the mechanical preparations for his mad scheme were completed. The time fear was erased from his mind, only to be replaced by a fear that fate might intercede and prevent the big act. This fear grew into a premonition of danger; a premonition that pricked his mind with torturing reality as he climbed into his cockpit on the tenth morning. With a care that he had not shown in several days, he looked to his supply of ammunition and examined the breech of his gun.

And that premonition of danger turned into a reality. When eight miles deep in German air, with eyes glued to camera sights, the Kid experienced a sensation that all was not well. Almost instantly, the monotonous droning of the plane's engine was drowned out by a screaming sound as uncanny as any hell itself could possibly produce.

The Kid's head jerked up. Eyes flashed about. Not fifty yards away, as if hurled from the outer regions of space by the wrath of God, a flame-wreathed Spad plummeted earthwards. Close behind, turning end over end clumsily, fell an object that was a man's body—a flyer with whom the Kid had broken bread only a few minutes before.

THE next second the sky about the Salmson seemed to suddenly fill with diving, twisting, zooming aircraft—Mercedes-throated Fokkers, tri-winged Albatros scouts, circular-marked Spads—and these last in a minority that was a pathetic prophecy of tragedy.

The Kid experienced a sensation of despair. Fate had interceded. He was about to die, and all his cherished plans, all his careful preparations, were to count as naught.

A wave of stubborn rebellion swept aside that despair. The Kid jerked to action. With a curse he heaved overboard the camera that impeded his free movement. With savage fierceness he grabbed the handle of his gun. One hand smacked the cocking handle; the other put pressure to bear upon the trigger. Out into space hissed red-hot tracers, weaving more artistry into a rare sky pattern.

In the front cockpit, coolly maneuvering a course for home, the veteran Brad heard and smiled. Ignoring the death that swarmed around his plane, he took time to turn his head and shout encouragement to his youthful gunner. The Kid heard the shout, and new courage welled in his breast. He swung his gun with a more careful deliberation and pressed the trigger with a greater coolness.

Suddenly a cry of triumphant elation shrilled from the young gunner's throat. He had scored. A charging Fokker had gone to pieces in the hail of lead he had spewed up to meet it. Another cry, and still another cry. Two Spads had accounted for a like number of the enemy.

FOR the next few minutes, the very superiority of numbers was a handicap to the German flyers. Their leader seemed to grasp that fact, for he wagged

a signal that drew his shy wolves off.

Temporarily unmolested, the battle-scarred Salmson lumbered on. About it, a sad remnant of Spads closed in. But the breathing spell was shortlived. Back came the Jerries with a vengeance that had been fired by the Americans' stubborn resistance. With motors roaring and Spandaus yapping insanely, the Boche flyers seemed intent upon nothing short of annihilation.

Spads, baring their Vickers fangs, turned to meet the relentless attackers. The Salmson staggered on. Again the Kid felt the crate trembling under his feet, the hot gun vibrating in his hands. Again he looked into the red, glaring eyes of death, and in exchange offered leaden slugs himself.

Madly he swung the gun; savagely he pressed the trigger. He was fighting for life. He couldn't die now. He had a mission to fulfill.

A repetition of the triumphant cry he had uttered a few minutes before burst from the gunner's throat. He had scored again. His tracers, stretching out like giant feelers, had touched a gas tank. The Fokker emitted black smoke, then burst into a livid sheet of flame. Another long, steady burst of destruction, another cry of elation. An Albatros this time, its pilot slumped forward against a wobbling stick, hot slugs gnawing in his breast.

Enraged by the stiff opposition, the Jerries fell with renewed fury upon the snarling, scratching planes. Spads, like exhausted beasts, slowed, tottered, then slipped off into never-ending spins. The Salmson, quivering under withering bursts, fought back, lived on.

It was a glorious defense, but the odds were too great. As, one by one, guns jammed or hammers bit into empty feed belts, hope fled from courageous breasts. But suddenly, new notes were added to the battle chorus. Spads, French-driven Spads, began to drop with telling effect upon the Jerries from above!

Fokkers, caught off guard by the new arrivals, turned tails in disorganized retreat. As a result, four battered Spads and a wrecked Salmson were saved from complete destruction. Those weary crates

staggered home, where wheels, like aching bones, were set down gingerly upon a welcome tarmac.

As a crowd of anxious flyers and curious mechanics gathered about the ships, the survivors climbed dazedly down from their bullet-spattered cockpits. The Kid lingered in his seat for an extra minute to send up a silent prayer of thanksgiving. Then, leaning over his cockpit combing, he placed a balancing hand on Brad's shoulder and leaped to the ground.

"Kid, you're all there!" praised Brad. "You gave it to the Jerries like a veteran!"

"I'll say he did!" chimed in Pinkey Meadows. "He sure knocked a leech off my tail!"

And the other three survivors were just as loud in their praise of the Kid's courageous gunning.

Then suddenly, as if remembering the eight flyers who would not return, a silence, like a last salute of respect, descended upon the group.

A wretched C.O. received the six survivors in his office, listened to their individual reports, then gladdened them with the announcement that patrols were over. However, almost with the next breath, he plunged them back into mental dejection.

"If those clouds to the north spread in, as the weather bureau promises," he stated slowly, "we attack the Grand Imperial at dawn!"

Unmuffled exclamations burst from the pilots. They had just cheated death, only to be greeted by such an announcement. God! What did Headquarters think they were? Iron men? There was a touch of rebellion in their muttered oaths as they filed from the room.

The news spread. Flyers heard, glanced at the northern sky, then turned away with sinking hearts. The clouds were slowly coming in.

FOR the remainder of that memorable October day, the 19th American Pursuit Squadron was quiet. The spell of impending disaster was upon them.

The Kid, though not included in the expedition, seemed to be suffering as bad

a case of raw nerves as the others. Many of the flyers noticed that highly nervous condition, but little did they dream that the Kid was waiting for dusk, to set out upon a private mission that might free them from their rendezvous with death.

An intervention came before that dusk. About an hour before the curtains of darkness were timed to descend, a large brown limousine turned off the highway, purred slowly across the field and stopped before the farmhouse. Four officers in long military coats climbed out and marched into the C.O.'s office. A couple of minutes later, a bugle sounded the call to quarters.

The recreation hall was quickly filled with grim, silent flyers. They were not kept waiting long. Almost immediately the door connecting with the C.O.'s office was thrown open, and as the inmates of the office appeared in the doorway, an audible intake of breaths swept through the crowded room. The leader of America's forces stood, tall and commanding, upon the portal.

The general raised his hand for silence. "Gentlemen of the 19th," he began in a serious, convincing voice, "I am not here to waste words. You all know what lies ahead. I hope that in that knowledge, you realize the importance attached. If you fail in your mission, which Heaven forbid, thousands of men will have to die before victory and peace can be attained. On the other hand, if you succeed, as I have no doubt you will, the war will be speedily brought to an end. With this thought as impetus, and a nation's prayers as strength, I know you will not fail! May God be with each and every one of you!"

With that, the general turned to Major Burton, shook hands, then nodded to his attendants. Followed by those officers, he passed rapidly from the room. There were many more fields to visit.

The door had hardly closed behind the visitors than Major Burton's voice boomed for silence.

"Men," he announced dramatically, "I am not going to send you on that mission tomorrow morning. I am going to lead you!"

A flood of ear-splitting applause swept through the room. Again the major waved his arms in a gesture for silence. When the noise had subsided sufficiently, he turned and focused his gaze upon the Kid. Out of a clear sky he dropped a bomb upon the unsuspecting youth.

"Jackson, I'm even going to give you a chance," he spoke. "You won the right in that scrap today. From the reports of the other flyers, I am convinced that you can handle a gun. You're going down and fly with the 27th English Bombers. Sergeant Brown will drive you down in the side-car as soon as you're ready."

The Kid started. A strange expression came over his face. He looked about him dazedly, helplessly, then responded lamely, "Yes, sir."

With his brain a chaotic jumble of confused thoughts, he pushed his way through the flyers and stumbled from the room.

Major Burton frowned perplexedly. The flyers turned upon one another curiously, each and every eye asking the same question: was the Kid a quitter?

Even Brad was dumbfounded by the Kid's strange reception of the announcement. However, he did not desert his protégé. He turned to the major.

"Your unexpected news knocked him dizzy," he offered in defense of the Kid's actions. "However, don't you think he's too young to get killed off, sir?"

Major Burton shrugged. "Sorry you look at it that way, captain. I was only trying to give him the chance he's been begging for ever since he came up."

HALF an hour later, with Brad's slaps stinging on his back, the Kid climbed into the squadron sidecar. Sergeant Brown straddled the cycle, and at a nod from his passenger, gunned the motor and let out the clutch.

What promised to be only a bumpy run down to the English field and a lonesome ride back to the 19th suddenly turned out to be a night of miserable experience for Sergeant Brown. With the home field six miles behind, and the darkness of a cloudy night hanging like a cloak over the road, he suddenly heard his pas-

senger shouting for him to stop. The halt made, the sergeant turned and looked squarely into the muzzle of an ominous automatic.

"This is as far as you go, sergeant," spoke the Kid. "You'll either walk back like a nice soldier, or I'll have to tie you up."

The sergeant hesitated an instant, as if weighing the possibility of the Kid's seriousness. It took only the instant to decide that point.

"I'll walk!" he grated. Then, still under the threat of the gun, he climbed to the ground and began to walk slowly up the road. Twenty yards away he halted and turned. From that point he lashed the Kid with a barrage of words that stung deep under the skin.

The Kid offered no retort. Instead, he climbed aboard the vacated saddle and drowned out the fiery barrage with a suddenly gunned motor. A minute later the enraged sergeant was left far behind.

After maneuvering several different byways, the Kid came to a narrow, seldom-used road leading off through a clump of trees. He turned into that road and took the motorcycle over the rough ground slowly and carefully. After a run of several hundred yards he suddenly emerged into an opening. As he cut his wheel to the right, the headlight swept rapidly across a long narrow field, touched momentarily upon a large expanse of water, then came to rest upon an old deserted mill. The Kid rode straight up to the ramshackle building and as he cut the motor, the sound of water falling over a dam came to his ears.

Dismounting, he swung the cycle around with the headlight pointed up the field. That done, he switched off the light and took out his small pocket torch. Hurrying anxiously over to the mill, he pulled open the door to what had once been a tool house and directed the rays of his light into the black interior.

"Good!" he exclaimed with evident relief. "Everything's safe. Now, if Sandy only comes through!"

He repeated that statement time after

time as he paced nervously back and forth between the cycle and the mill. Then suddenly a faint humming came down from the darkness of the northern sky. Sandy *was* coming through.

Tingling with excitement, the Kid ran over to the motorcycle and switched on the headlamp. A long white shaft of light painted a narrow runway up the grassy field.

The humming in the murky sky increased to a roar, then suddenly died. With wind howling weirdly through taut wires a dark plane glided into the area of light and swept to a fast, smooth landing. The Kid ran out, grabbed a wing tip and led the plane right up to the water's edge.

"Sandy, you're a prince!" he praised exultantly as the Swede leaped down from the single cockpit.

The mechanic acknowledged the praise with a shrug. "Aye bane get the guardhouse," he responded laconically.

Conversation stopped at that. Time was too valuable. Both men realized that fact. They realized that tonight they were not rehearsing, that they were beginning the first act in a play that must go through errorless, lest that play be converted into tragedy and the morning sky become a field of slaughter.

They fell to with the knowledge of careful preparations. Minutes passed. They swiftly removed wheels from the small plane and in their place supplanted two long, narrow pontoons.

"My camera boxes," grinned the Kid as he stepped back and surveyed the completed job.

Then the two workers made another trip to the toolhouse. Removing some rubbish, they uncovered a long metal cylinder. Carefully they lifted that concentrated mass of potential destruction and slowly bore it out to the plane. A few minutes later they had it slung snugly in an improvised bomb rack directly under the fuselage.

Without wasting more time, Sandy swung the prop, and as the powerful motor burst into life, he rejoined the Kid, and together they slid the converted plane into the dammed-up lake.

THE Kid looked at the plane floating there upon the water, and as the realness of the occasion struck him, a pang of fear assailed his brain. Then, as suddenly as it had come, that fear was gone. Sandy's arm was about his shoulders, the man's words sounding in his ears.

"You bane one grand, crazy Kid!"

There was a new note in the Swede's voice, and the Kid did not miss that note. With it echoing in his soul, he placed a foot upon a pontoon and then drew himself up into the cockpit. As Sandy, holding the tail-assembly, directed the plane, he called back over his shoulder, "If I don't come back, Sandy, just tell the fellows that the Kid stepped out!"

It was youth's forced attempt at brave words, and with them his feet stiffened upon the rudder bar. His right hand brought the stick up to neutral, as his left pushed over the throttle. Instantly the idling engine pulsed into a mighty roar of power. In response, the plane glided out upon the pond, gained speed rapidly, then lifted gently from the wind-rippled water.

For the next few minutes the grimness of the mission was forgotten in the fight to maneuver the small, tricky plane through the dark, low-ceilinged sky. However, as the flash-dotted Front was reached and passed without mishap, confidence returned to the Kid. As his self-assurance grew, he let his mind fly back to the 19th. He visualized the return of Sergeant Brown, and pictured the expression upon the faces of the flyers as they crowded around and listened to the enraged sergeant tell his story.

Then slowly, hidden by the darkness and fanned by a strong backwash of moist tearing wind, a cloud of pain mounted the youth's face. The men would misunderstand his act. Not knowing that he was out in a desperate attempt to save them from a possible catastrophe, they would brand him with contempt, would call him quitter!

The Kid shook off the unpleasant thoughts and forced himself back into the spirit of his mission. He ran his eyes over the shielded instrument panel, then

glanced at the luminous figures on his watch. All was going well.

Suddenly he started. The plane wobbled crazily under his unsteady hand. The sky directly in front of him had suddenly seemed to flare up, to blaze blindly, then to glow out. His goal lay ahead. That startling flare-up had come from the massive blast furnaces located at Ozden, and that city lay upon the banks of the Rhine, thirty miles above the Grand Imperial.

For the Kid the next few moments were tense. He passed to the left of Ozden and, when certain that he was over the river, banked straight downstream. For five full minutes he held that course. Then slowly he began to descend. By the timing, he must be over that swampy region five miles south of Ozden.

At one thousand feet, the Kid leveled out and risked a flare. To his great elation he saw the river directly below him. With a murmured prayer for success, he cut the throttle and nosed down. Quickly, he released a second flare, and by its eerie light brought the small plane to a smooth landing upon the surface of Germany's sacred river. Hardly a second later, the flare touched the water and hissed the scene into Stygian darkness.

For a full minute the Kid sat tense in the cockpit, his body trembling. Then, as no hostile sounds came to his ears, his breath began to come easier. Apparently the descent had been made unseen.

The Kid spent another minute in letting his eyes become accustomed to the darkness. Then, as the faint outline of the shores could be discerned, he became all action. A glance at his wrist-watch. Nine o'clock. Dawn would come at four-thirty. The spot at which he had landed was twenty-five miles above the Grand Imperial, and the average flow of the river was four miles per hour. The answer was simple arithmetic.

A thrill of triumph raced up his spine. With the aid of the paddle he would make it, with an hour to spare. But how many things could happen in that hour!

The Kid unstrapped the paddle from the fuselage and then descended carefully to the right pontoon. There he began to stroke surely and silently.

MINUTES crept into hours. Mile after mile of the dimly outlined shores drifted by as the Rhine bore the plane along. And on the pontoon, nerves taut, muscles aching protestingly, the Kid added his body weight to the drift.

The Kid fought off a feeling of loneliness. For the hundredth time he glanced at his watch and calculated rapidly for a moment. The paddle almost dropped from his hand. His body trembled under the realization. He had passed the invisible deadline, and was now within that forbidden area within ten miles of the Grand Imperial.

Another two hours passed—two hours that were a century of torture to nerves already rubbed raw. Then a sudden glare lighted the sky not two miles away, hung against the cloud ceiling for a minute, then faded. It was soon followed by a rumbling, a deep rumbling that caused the Kid's breath to come faster, his heart to pound louder and louder. There was but one answer. That glare was from an engine's firebox, that rumbling from trucks against rails on a bridge.

Tense with excitement, the Kid stood up and looked about him. Far down the dark expanse of water, tiny lights twinkled in a series of long arches that spanned the river. Without doubt they were fastened in the flanks of the Grand Imperial, that bridge upon which Europe's eyes were focused for the dawn.

Cautiously, the Kid began to make his final preparations. The paddle became a gangplank from pontoon to pontoon. Standing in the center of it, he slowly wound the propeller to secure compression. With this done, he climbed into the cockpit and let the plane continue to drift closer and closer to the fast-enlarging mass of arched steel.

Half a mile above the massive bridge, the Kid slowly lowered the improvised anchor he had brought along. As it took hold in the muddy bottom, the rope grew taut, holding the plane at a position in the very center of the river. There, though tethered, the little plane crouched, waiting to launch itself like some primitive beast upon an unsuspecting enemy.

What seemed hours later a distant noise came to the Kid's ears. Quickly he recognized the sound as the heralded approach of a heavily loaded locomotive. And that locomotive was coming from the interior of Germany.

With heart thumping fast and furiously, the Kid saw the train's headlight approach to within a few yards of the bridge. Then a rattling of steel and a screeching of brakes told him that the train was stopping, and that meant only one thing. It was loaded with ammunition, and was stopping, even as Brad had told him, to be inspected for bombs.

The Kid cut on the switch and climbed to the pontoon. Out on the paddle gangplank, he hung his hands upon the propeller and waited tensely. The moment was almost upon him.

There was a long wail from the locomotive's whistle, then a powerful puff, and slowly the engine began to pull its load of potential destruction out upon the Grand Imperial.

At that first puff, the Kid swung the prop, and the primed engine burst into life. With an agility made super-human by the importance of the moment, the young flyer pulled himself out of the river where he had fallen, onto a pontoon and then into the cockpit. Over went the anchor rope with one hand and the throttle with the other. The plane leaped forward on its errand of destruction.

Instantly, and as if by magic, searchlights flashed on at a hundred different places. But the Kid had his plane in the air and was bearing rapidly down upon the Grand Imperial before they spotted him.

Wild yells came to his ears, followed in turn by a screaming of sirens and a blast of concentrated machine-gun fire. Death sang at a thousand spots about him, but he had eyes and thoughts for but one thing. And that was the long ammunition train lumbering slowly across Germany's Grand Imperial.

BACK at the 19th, a bunch of sleepless pilots collected in the squadron mess and moodily sipped at cups of steaming black coffee. Few words were spoken, for

a silent understanding seemed to prevail among the nerve-trying men. Even Spud had no comments to offer, and Brad, still brooding over the apparent desertion of the Kid, also refrained from talk.

Major Burton sensed the terrific strain under which the men were laboring. Respecting their feelings, he forced back the speech welling in his throat, glanced at his watch and then motioned towards the door.

"Ready, men?"

With that, he pushed open the wooden barrier and walked out into the wet, clammy dawn. Behind him pressed the flyers. Overhead, the low-hanging ceiling seemed an added factor bearing down with depressing weight upon them. Out on the line, even the Spads seemed to catch the spirit of the occasion and to reflect it in dead-sounding engine beats. Standing by, ground men looked silently on, spectators watching sacrificial offerings prepared for the slaughter.

Major Burton halted at the wing tip of the first Spad. The flyers grouped slowly about him. On the outer edge, groundmen slunk in closer.

But the C. O. of the 19th was destined never to issue the order he so dreaded, for at the instant his lips parted, a mighty shout of triumph sounded back in the communication room. A form darted through the lighted doorway, dashed up to the curious flyers and halted before the C. O.

"Headquarters!" he sputtered breathlessly. "No attack!"

"What do you mean?" pressed the major eagerly. "Make sense, man!"

"Headquarters just phoned!" exclaimed the operator, his breath coming easier. "Grand Imperial blown to hell! Some bat flyer found a way through. Laid an egg on an ammunition train."

"Devil you say!" burst the major. "Did you hear that, men? The Grand Imperial blown to hell!"

The flyers stared at the C. O. as if locked in a stupefied daze. Then suddenly, half-prayer, half-exclamation, an audible "Thank God!" burst fervently from the lips of a pilot.

"Drinks!" exclaimed another pilot. "I want to turn up a glass to that bird who laid that egg!"

Instantly the men responded. As one man, they turned towards the farmhouse with its improvised bar.

But before the rejuvenated flyers had progressed half a dozen steps, a motor's deep-throated roar descended to their ears from the murky eastern sky. Close upon the heels of that roar came a small plane whose strange-looking landing gear barely skimmed the tops of the hangars. A second later it had flashed by and was going up on a wing. Then it had banked around and was coming back.

"My God!" exclaimed Major Burton. "A seaplane! He can't land here!"

The pilot of the strange ship seemed of a different opinion. He cut his throttle and came gliding low across the field. Flyers and ground men held their breaths in preparation for the inevitable crash. Major Burton swore under his breath, then bawled loudly. "Run out the ambulance!"

But the flyer changed his mind at the last possible moment. The motor roared and the plane swept on across the field and climbed above the tree tops. Then back it came again, this time to begin a frantic, helpless circling of the field.

Suddenly Brad became aware of some one tugging at his elbow. He turned and looked into the troubled eyes of Sandy.

"Aye tank it bane the Kid, sir," whispered the head mechanic.

The words hit Brad like a blow. Facts dawned upon his brain with lightning-like rapidity. For a moment he wavered uncertainly, then with a wild cry dashed out upon the field.

"Ground lights!" he shouted fiercely, jumping about crazily in an attempt to draw the helpless flyer's attention.

The pilot's head came into plain view as he extended it out over the cockpit combing to look down at the excited flyer dancing upon the tarmac. Tighter and tighter grew the circle. Brad the vortex of that line of flight.

Then, with a cry, Brad sprang towards the ambulance, routed the driver

and took control. With a screaming of gears he sent the fast machine speeding down the field.

At the far end of the runway, Brad turned the ambulance and leaped once more to the ground, watching the plane as it went far out over the trees. Then it banked and came gliding back towards the field.

Rapidly at first, then slowly and more slowly, it came nearer. Then, as tense on-lookers clenched their fists and held their breaths, the pontoons settled upon the skid-sloshed runway and ground up a double spray of flinty dust. The under side of the pontoons shredded their covering with a splintering of three-ply. The formers became skids. The plane wavered. Fifty miles per hour—forty—thirty—twenty-five. It started to wobble dangerously, then buckle its improvised landing gear. There was a scraping

sound as a wing dragged the ground, then a rending crash.

With wild shouts Brad and the other pilots rushed to the wreckage.

"It's the Special!" exclaimed one as he began to tear away the crumpled wing.

"My God! And the Kid flying her!" swore another.

"You're crazy, man!" blurted Major Burton, pushing up and leaning over the stunned pilot. At the first look, an incredulous expression flooded his face.

The Kid moved. His eyes opened. For a second he stared about him dazedly.

"Jackson, what the hell's the meaning of this?" demanded the major.

The Kid offered no response. Instead, his hand appeared through a hole in the torn fabric, reached up, and boldly removed the ribbon of the *Croix de Guerre* from Major Burton's coat.

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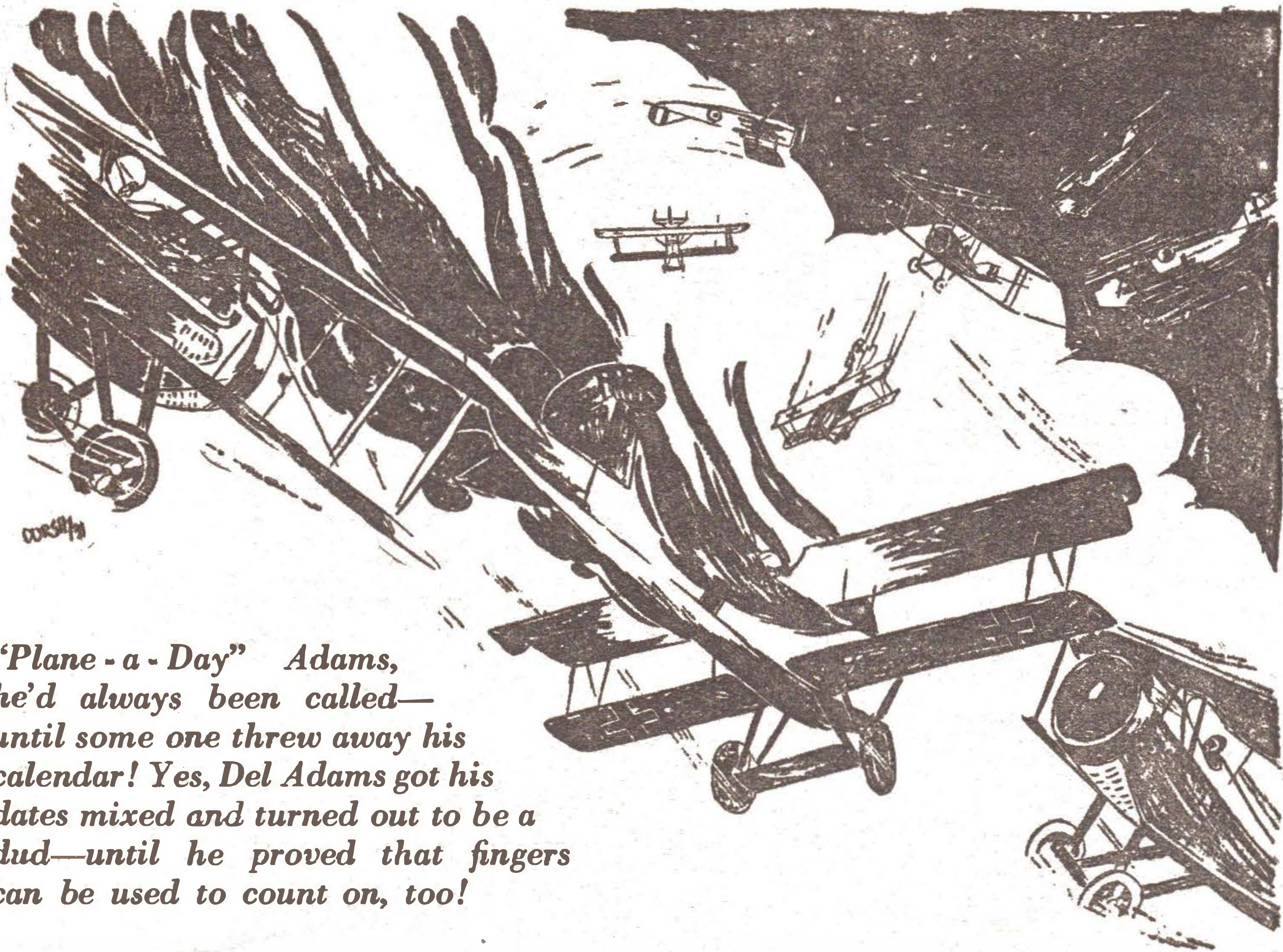
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THEY'RE ALL IN FLYING ACES

Hedges continued to pump hot lead into the blazing Fokker in front of him!



“Plane - a - Day” Adams, he’d always been called—until some one threw away his calendar! Yes, Del Adams got his dates mixed and turned out to be a dud—until he proved that fingers can be used to count on, too!

Vultures From Hell

By HERBERT FRANKLIN

BILLY HEDGES climbed out of the ship he had ferried up, surveyed the camouflaged hangars and buildings of the 69th Pursuit Squadron and gave a brief shudder, not entirely for the purpose of shaking the chill out of his slight form. Despite the detailed instructions he had received, he realized that he had almost missed locating the drome. Another few minutes of flying and he might have picked out a German *Staffel* on which to bring down his ship. What a fine ending for his career that would have been—a prisoner of war before he had even reported for action.

With the self-consciousness of a rookie, he inquired of the sergeant who had taken over his plane the location of headquarters.

“Over there, sir—Captain Adams commanding.”

“Hello, Del—or should I say Captain Adams to a cousin?” A boyish smile softened the stiff salute the replacement gave the C.O.

The smile of recognition in the keen gray eyes of Captain Del Adams shadowed before a burst of annoyance.

“What are you doing here?” he snapped.

“I’m your new replacement, Del,” explained Hedges, taken aback a bit as he handed over his credentials. “You don’t seem overjoyed to see your favorite cousin.”

But Captain Adams was staring at the papers as if they represented his death warrant; his muscles worked convulsively on the lean jaws. Pushing him-

self up from the desk, and thrusting his fists down on the desk top, Captain Del Adams gazed in anger at his younger cousin. Hedges had a feeling that this rage was not directed against him personally, but that only made the matter more puzzling. This was the last form of reception he had anticipated.

"Out of all the outfits at the Front," breathed Adams, "you had to pick this one."

"I couldn't have chosen better company, could I?" Hedges smiled placatingly. "I've been hearing about the record of planes you've been piling up. Everybody has."

"Oh, have they?" Adams walked to the window. "Well, things are different now. I've been lucky. The outfit has been lucky. But luck has been governed by the law of averages. We're due for tough breaks, and you have to pick this time to come up. Von Steuben has moved in across the way."

"What of it? You'll take care of him the way you have the other Jerries." Hedges' smile was that of a hero-worshiper. Del had always been his idol. The star of the high school team when Billy was only an elementary student. Del Adams, the all-around college athletic star, the All-American.

"I suppose you think it's all flag-waving and band concerts up here. Hell, with your drag why didn't you have sense enough to pick out an arm-chair job? Ten years from now it won't make a bit of difference where you fought the *guerre*. What's it coming to, anyway, when they're sending us kids who haven't started to shave yet?"

Billy Hedges colored. "What drag are you talking about?"

"You're practically a relation of Colonel Macey's, aren't you? Or will be when you marry Lois Macey, his niece."

"Well, how about you and Dorothy? Or don't you know that Lois' sister didn't marry Cutter?"

The eyes seemed to bore through Hedges. "What difference does it make to me whom she married or didn't marry? It is no concern of mine. Sergeant!"

He barked the command and a sergeant entered. "Place Lieutenant Hedges in Lieutenant Greever's quarters." The C.O. turned to the desk without favoring his cousin with another glance or word.

As he followed the sergeant across the tarmac, Billy Hedges tried to puzzle matters out with knitted brows. Had he touched a sore spot by mentioning Dorothy Macey? Or was it true that life at the Front changed a man, and was this a sample?

Bill had never remembered his cousin as surly. True, he had been a quiet chap, hard to fathom at times. For example, Billy and Lois had been sweethearts almost from childhood. Del and Dorothy had grown up together, too; but nobody in town had suspected Del was interested in Dorothy until after he had graduated from college—not until their engagement had been announced, in fact. And then this Cutter chap had come to town. Dark-featured, sophisticated, possessing those graces the reticent Del lacked. There was the row, the engagement broken—then Del jumping up to Canada to join the Royal Air Force, and later transferring to the American Air Service when the U. S. entered the war.

AN orderly shook Hedges out of a sound sleep the next morning, and a few moments later the heavy-lidded rookie went out into the cool, gray dawn. Through the shifting mists, Hedges made out the ships growling at the line, the ghostly forms of mechanics sifting about the planes, and the knot of pilots.

"The skipper wants to see you, Hedges," said a pilot whom he had met at mess the night before.

Billy found the C.O., burly in flying clothes. The ends of a silk knitted muffler, caught about his neck, danced in the wash of a prop. Something about the muffler stirred Hedges' memory cells, but he forgot about it as Adams saw him.

"You're going up behind me," said the C.O. gruffly. "Stick close. Try any funny business and I'll wallop the tar out of you. Hurry over and get a mug of java

SA

for yourself and learn to get into your togs quicker."

Hedges went to the mess shack with globules of mist clinging to his hot, pink cheeks. What did Del mean, talking to him like that? The trouble with Del was that he thought of him as a kid cousin. Well, he'd show Del he had grown up.

As Billy Hedges looked down on the war-retched Front in that dawn of his first flight over the lines, he experienced the panicky feeling of most rookies the first time over. He sweated in that nightmarish sensation that he had forgotten all he knew about handling a ship and that in a jam he would be helpless. But there was jamming that morning. The flight completed its patrol and returned to the drome, and as Hedges climbed out, he underwent mingled feelings of relief and disappointment. There hadn't even been any Jerries up this morning. Then he heard two of his companions discussing an enemy flight—and Hedges had not even spotted the planes.

Hedges' second patrol proved uneventful, and several days passed before he saw action. When it came, he had a lot to do with bringing it about. After that first day Hedges had been able to scan the sky more expertly, and on several occasions had noted flights just behind the German lines. According to his conceived precepts of the game, the Yanks should have gone over and given the Jerries a scrap, but if Del saw the flights, he gave them no heed. He acted like a cop sticking to his beat and not straining his eyesight looking for trouble.

After one of these flights, Hedges had gone to headquarters to make a suggestion, had found the C.O. arguing over the phone, and had discreetly withdrawn. But before he softly closed the door he had heard Adams say, "Too untried. Not experienced enough."

So on this day Billy Hedges flew with a grim purpose—a purpose that became even more determined as the flight reached the customary limit of its patrol. Hedges had noticed a German two-seater observation plane hovering about, unattended. He concluded that it was di-

recting artillery fire, despite the lack of protection. Funny, he thought, that Del had given it no attention. Well, he'd show Del something.

Hedges tipped over on a wing and went down in a tight dive. The Jerry made no attempt to pull out, but calmly awaited his attack. And a moment or two later Hedges awakened to the reason of the Jerry's sense of security. The air about him was filled with plunging Fokkers that must have popped out of those clouds above the two-seater. It was a trap, he realized, and like a sucker he had stumbled right into it. Hedges relived the entire brief span of his life in those seconds that followed. He heard the clatter of guns, saw the whirling planes and the stabbing orange-flamed Spandaus, smelled the acrid smoke of tracers weaving past his nostrils, and felt his Spad quiver as a burst nearly slashed away his tail assemblage.

Gray forms joined the wild millings. A gray shadow ripped down on him with guns blazing, and Hedges got a glimpse of the flying ends of Del Adams' muffler as the Spad slid over him. Hedges involuntarily ducked as a burst of machine-gun fire splintered his instrument board. He kicked out, looked back in dismay, and saw the Jerry on his tail—but the second burst never came. The Boche snapped convulsively in his seat as Vickers bullets from the twin guns of Del Adams ended his career.

A flight of French Nieuports winging over from the south satiated the appetites of the Jerries. While Hedges was pulling out of a spin, the Fokkers climbed to the clouds. Adams waved his men back into formation. Hedges meekly fell into place and the flight headed homeward.

As Hedges climbed out of his bus on the home tarmac, Del Adams headed for him, fuming like Vesuvius on the make. "Pull another stunt like that," he flamed, "and I'll spank you publicly in front of the whole outfit. Go to your quarters."

DAYS passed before the C.O. would give Hedges so much as a surly greeting. Hedges drifted into headquar-

ters one day to have it out with his cousin, and to find out what was behind the grouchy unfriendly attitude that made every act Hedges performed appear to be the wrong one. Instead of finding the C.O., however, Hedges encountered Spanner, the adjutant. The latter was doing a lot of "yessing" over the phone. He hung up as Hedges approached.

"That's the way it is every hour of the day and night," protested the adjutant. "Von Steuben raises hell and every brass hat in the sector puts the bee on us. 'Von Steuben strafing troops at Moraine.' 'Von Steuben shooting up a supply train.' 'Von Steuben attacking the front-line trenches.' 'Von Steuben twenty miles behind the lines, unmolested.' Why don't we do something about it?"

"Why don't we?" asked Hedges grimly.

"Why ask me? I'm not running the outfit. Oh, hell, what a life! Have a fag?"

Hedges ignored the proffered package and asked grimly, "When did Captain Adams last get confirmation for an enemy plane?"

"Ask me an easy one. My memory isn't so good these days."

"Back at Field Five, just before I came up here I heard they were calling him 'Plane-a-day Adams.'"

"Maybe he's changed to night work."

"I'm serious about this," exclaimed Hedges. "There's something wrong in this outfit. Even if I am new, I can see that. The morale is lousy."

"You're telling me! But what are we going to do about it? Listen to some advice, kid. Look after yourself, and let Adams do his own worrying."

Spanner did not know the relationship that existed between Del Adams and Hedges; and since Hedges had not told anyone, and presumably Adams had not, none in the 69th knew of any ties between the C.O. and the youthful replacement. Hedges made no further attempt to question the adjutant. Undoubtedly Del Adams was not the man Hedges supposed. Perhaps he had never been. A college hero—what was that? It took a war to bring out the real qual-

ities in a man. Perhaps Del Adams was only base metal after all, and Hedges had been viewing him through gold-tinted glasses.

Hedges went over to Fouray that night, a town a dozen miles from the drome. He was sitting in the Bras d'Or, a popular resort for the officers in the sector, when Captain Adams entered. Without looking to right or left, Adams slumped into a chair at a vacated table and ordered a bottle of liquor. Hedges was going over to join him, but on second thought decided not to. He saw Adams pour a glass of the strong drink and gulp it without batting an eye. Almost immediately he poured a second drink. His actions and attitude resembled those of a man deliberately setting out to get pie-eyed.

Before Adams had entered, a big chap had been strolling around the smoke-clouded room as if he were the self-appointed life of the party. He wore bars and wings; and on inquiry Hedges learned that he was Captain Nels Conrad, a flyer of some note. In going to the table Adams had brushed by Conrad without noticing him, but Conrad had not been unaware of Adams. He was a rather good-looking, dark-featured chap—the kind that gets surly, however, when he has a few drinks under his belt.

A group of four flyers entered, evidently from Conrad's outfit. They swept him to a small bar and ordered drinks, but Hedges noted uneasily that Conrad kept looking around at Adams' table. Fortified with sufficient drinks, Conrad made his way uncertainly to Adams' table and called for silence.

"Gen'men, we are 'specially honored t'night. We have as our guest 'Plane-a-Day Adams'—only some'n must have thrown away his cal'ndar."

Adams made no comment, but Hedges saw the gray eyes grow steely hard and those jaw muscles begin to work.

"What's matter, Adams?" taunted Conrad. "Decide to take a vacation when von Steuben moved into your sector? You're the kind of a glory-grabber who

makes his rep knockin' down set-ups, but when y' get a little opposition, you fold up—"

Adams came out of his seat as if released from a spring. His clenched right fist traveled so fast that Conrad was unable to get his guard up. The big flyer dropped to the floor as if shot.

Exclaiming angrily, Conrad's mates advanced on Adams. Hedges darted to the side of his cousin. Adams saw him, and the cool anger with which he faced Conrad's companions vanished in a flash of rage.

"What in hell are you doing here?" he demanded of Hedges.

"I thought you might need me," said Hedges.

"When I need you, I'll send for you. Get out."

Hedges went, but turned at the door and saw that the taste for action had vanished from Conrad's companions. Calmly, Adams sat down at the table again, and in the presence of that hostile crowd he poured himself another drink. Hedges returned alone to the drome. He could not have felt worse if his own chin had stopped that lethal right Captain Del Adams swung.

The next morning Adams brought his patrol back to the drome early and almost immediately took off again in a solo flight. He had been doing this often of late, and frequently returned with frayed wings and built-riddled fuselage—but with no comment. This morning, while Adams was out, Hedges received word that Colonel Macey wished to see him at Headquarters. Hedges hurried to meet the man he hoped some day to be able to call his father-in-law.

He found the tall colonel pacing the floor, looking older and graver than when Hedges had last seen him. Well, war did that to men. Hedges did not know whether to salute Colonel Macey or to speak familiarly to an old family friend. The slender, precise colonel spared him the embarrassment by speaking first.

"Captain Adams is out and I haven't time to wait for him. I want you to de-

liver a message to him. I prefer not to have it pass through the hands of an adjutant. They're such gossips." Then, as if realizing that it was up to him as the superior to recognize the bonds of intimacy that existed between them, he asked, "How have you been?"

"Fine," answered Hedges. "Have you heard from home recently?"

"I had a letter from Dorothy a few days ago. Everyone is fine. She asked after you and—" His features clouded and he glanced at his watch. "Sit down, Billy. I want to take a moment to talk to you."

BILLY HEDGES was still sitting in headquarters when Captain Adams entered, his flying suit splattered with oil, his features grimy.

"What was Colonel Macey doing here?" demanded the C.O.

Hedges looked at him calmly. "I sent for him."

"You sent for him? What the hell for?"

"Because of what Conrad said about you last night at the Bras d'Or is the truth. I've recognized it for some time. And when stuff like that gets outside the outfit, when it gets to be common gossip—well, it's time to take action. I felt that because of my connection with Colonel Macey it was up to me to do something before you became a complete washout."

The C.O. blinked and stared at him. "Say, what the hell are you talking about?"

"I'm trying to tell you why I sent for Colonel Macey. I'm not the kid you think I am. I'm older—"

"You're a young fool—a fat-headed one at that."

"Call me what you like, but listen to me." Adams' eyes widened at this tone, and Hedges proceeded, calm and direct. "I'm your cousin, but I have to forget that because we are at war. My eyes have been opened since I've seen you under fire. I never could see you before because I was blinded by the glory. You're an opportunist—the kind that is a wonder when the opposition is weak,

but who, just as Conrad said, isn't there against real opposition—"

"Why, you little—"

"Let me finish, please. You've been avoiding von Steuben. You can't deny that. He's had the run of the sector and you haven't lifted your hand to stop him. As a leader you're a washout. I felt it was my duty to tell Colonel Macey the true facts before he found it out from some other source, before it became general knowledge. I think it can be arranged for you to be transferred back to the States and perhaps be promoted to a major and given charge of some training camp, or used to stimulate recruiting."

Captain Adams continued to stare at his cousin as if in a trance, and then the explosion came.

"Why, you dirty little stool pigeon! You call yourself a cousin, and you'd do a thing like this to me. Your eyes have been opened, have they?" He laughed insanely. "God, what a joke! Your eyes open. If you only could have seen!" He calmed suddenly. "That's what comes of sending kids to war."

"I'm not a kid. I'm twenty—"

"Shut up. You're getting me relieved of my command. I'm to stimulate recruiting. Go home and wear a string of medals. I'm an opportunist. I pick on set-ups. I'm a washout as a leader. Well, I'll show you. I haven't been sent back to America yet. I'm still in command of this outfit. Well, I'll introduce you to von Steuben. You and the rest of this pack. I'll find out whether you belong in France or back home in some kindergarten. Sergeant! Sergeant!"

The startled orderly appeared.

"I want every pilot out. Every damn one of them. Pull 'em out of sick beds if you have to. And get every available ship on the line. Beat it! I'm to stimulate recruiting, sergeant. Recruits for hell," and he burst into weird laughter. "Well, what the hell are you standing there for? You heard my orders. Every man, every ship, damn you!"

The wondering sergeant was able to locate only twelve pilots, twelve questioning air scrappers who wanted to

know what all the excitement was about. But to their questioning the sergeant could only answer that the skipper was terribly excited about something.

Twelve Spads roared off the tarmac, twelve pilots led by a fuming ace whose twisted scarf flapped out behind the cockpit like a pennant. And as Billy Hedges noted the scarf, he suddenly remembered where he had seen it before. Dorothy Macey had given that to Del as a birthday present. Blushing and stuttering, Del had taken the blue scarf and had hidden it; and if Billy Hedges had thought about it at all, it was to believe that it had been lost. But here it was in France; and day after day, every time Del Adams had taken off into the death-ridden skies, that scarf had gone with him as an amulet of good fortune.

The dozen ships split up into two close formations of six Spads each and roared toward the lines, with no man knowing the objective save Captain Adams.

THE sky ahead was soon black with bursting archie, sending out the warning that enemy planes were mission-bound; but racing Spads travel fast in a few minutes. Billy Hedges and his companions found themselves well behind the enemy lines.

Captain Adams signaled his mates to remain aloft and he himself plunged down. More accustomed to reading war signs from the air by now, Billy Hedges made out the flat tarmac of a drome with several camouflaged buildings. He had no doubt but what it was the drome of von Steuben.

Adams flew low over the drome and dropped something over the side. A few seconds later Erich von Steuben was reading a hurriedly scribbled note that said, "Come up and fight, you pig-stabber!"

Von Steuben swore as he crushed the note in his hands, but a look of caution came into the slate-colored eyes, and his bushy brows drew together. For days, now, von Steuben had been beset by an annoying plague. For the most part these *verdammte* Yankee flights had given him

a wide berth, but there had been one reckless, capable flyer who had repeatedly dared to attack von Steuben's flights all by himself. Ignoring the other planes in the flight, he had persistently gone for von Steuben. The German Ace had been able to wiggle out of some narrow escapes, and the disadvantage in numbers had sent the lone Spad scurrying for the clouds again. But von Steuben could not relish the knowledge that there roamed the skies a relentless foe whose sole purpose in war seemed to be to get him.

But this was not one plane. Here were a dozen. They did not come streaking out of nowhere. They challenged.

Billy Hedges saw the black Fokkers move along the ground like tiny moths and take off into the air one after another. Soon they were zooming upward while the dozen Spads circled and waited. Captain Adams had climbed again to his mates and had resumed his position at the head of the flight of which Billy Hedges was a member. His hand went up and a dozen Spads went roaring down in attack.

Wires shrieking the challenge of battle, struts groaning and the wind roaring past, the Spads plunged. It was impossible to maintain formation, but Hedges had anticipated such a condition. It would be every man for himself. The Fokkers scattered as the Spads plunged and swung around to give battle. Hedges did not have time to count the planes, but he felt certain that they numbered more than a dozen. He picked out one Fokker, and after a quick glance to assure himself that no other Jerries were closing in on his tail, he went after his kill.

He felt peculiarly cool as he flushed the Jerry. His first burst, fired more to warm his guns than to be effective, sliced a chunk out of the cross-emblazoned crimson rudder. The Jerry kicked away quickly and zoomed. Hedges went after him, realizing that he must waste no time. They were well behind the enemy lines, and any moment now the heavens might be swarming with more Germans.

Hanging to his tail in the climb, Hedges continued to pump lead. His tracers, streaming past the Kraut, gave him anxious moments. He started an Immelman, but fearing to be caught in a stalling point, he changed his mind. He fell off in a slip, lost altitude, and as he plunged past Hedges, fighting to regain control, the kid kicked over and plumbed him. Pressing the trips, Hedges sent his Vickers blazing into the Fokker beneath him and felt the satisfaction of his first victory as the Fokker rolled out of control and went spinning earthward, bursting into flames as it crashed.

But Hedges watched the falling plane too long. The rattle of Spandaus caused him to go over on his wing—and none too soon. A streak of black and crimson roared by, came over, and swung off again as a gray shadow dived for it. He caught a glimpse of the blue muffler. And then Hedges picked another Fokker. He tripped his guns, roared by, and zoomed to return to the attack, only to find the ship in flames and another Spad pumping lead into it. Hedges had been shooting at that Fokker—well, no matter.

Another Fokker burst into flames and plunged earthward. A second later a wobbly Spad followed after. Hedges took his eyes off the scrap long enough to see the gray ship make a half-decent landing. But a second Spad was not so fortunate. A comrade passed on to Valhalla in a flaming chariot.

Enraged, Hedges went after the Jerry he thought had scored the hit. A second Spad cut in and the Fokker burst into flames between the crossfire of Spads. As Hedges came about the tight bank, his dipping wing gave him a view of the ground below. It seemed to have suddenly climbed a thousand feet or more. He saw the smoking ruins of three more ships, and realized that the number of combat planes had been greatly diminished.

A Spad in trouble attempted to pull out, and three Fokkers flamed across the skies to get the cripple. Hedges and another Spad went to the rescue, and a quick glance revealed the blue muffler. Del

Adams remained in the fight. Two of the Fokkers swung about to give battle, but the third, hungry for the kill, lingered too long and fell a victim to Captain Adams' spitting Vickers.

Hedges suddenly felt the shock of bullets and the stick in his hand stung like a cracked bat as a bullet clipped a longeron. He kicked out of fire, but the Jerry had guessed his move and another burst of Spandau lead slashed Hedges' Spad too close to the cockpit for comfort. Bullets rattled off his cowling as he banked, and glancing back, he saw the grim, goggled pilot behind his flaming Spandaus. With a feeling of dismay, Hedges knew he was the target of von Steuben himself!

Once again that protecting gray shadow flashed above Hedges, and Captain Adams and von Steuben locked in mortal combat. Billy Hedges' motor missed and he lost altitude. Capture or destruction awaited him as he fought to get his motor kicking again. It caught, labored, and pulsated again as a short dive cleared the fault. Hedges looked back. One lone Spad was waging war with five Fokkers!

Where were the other Spads? Hedges saw three in close formation headed for the lines and waging a running fight with two darting Fokkers. A fourth Spad had pulled out; three, he knew, had gone down. Himself and that lone Spad—three unaccounted for. Then that Spad among the five Fokkers must belong to Del Adams!

PULLING his prop around, Hedges pointed his battered crate back towards his cousin. Even as he climbed he saw a Fokker burst into flames and a happy cheer broke through Hedges' grim lips. An instant later Captain Adams' Spad dived straight for another Fokker. Frantically the Jerry swerved away from the imminent collision, and in so doing brushed wings with a mate. The two Fokkers dipped earthward fighting for control. Two left!

Hedges fired when still at too great a distance to be accurate; but his streamers winging past the Jerry, cured

the latter's desire for finishing the fight. He had seen too many mates go down to destruction; and the five of a moment before had dwindled to two—then to one as the Jerry took a quick dive for the carpet.

Meanwhile Del Adams battled with the remaining Jerry. It was von Steuben, Billy felt certain. Hedges, favoring a weakened control, swung around to the assistance of his leader, realizing that with five Fokkers banging away at it, Del Adams' plane must be in pretty tough shape.

Even as he came about, Hedges saw his cousin twist out of a burst of Spandau fire and go down in an ominous flutter that laid icy fingers on Hedges' heart. The avid German leader, exulting in victory, whipped over for the kill. Abandoning caution, he dived with guns spitting. Hedges was not near enough to be of assistance, but he forced the last rev out of his laboring motor, never thinking that after von Steuben accounted for Del he would turn on him. But suddenly Del's Spad whipped out of the flutter and zoomed sharply.

Too late, von Steuben tried to check his mad dive. He was carried by, and Del Adams nosed over. Now Hedges saw their positions reversed. In a panic, the German Ace tried to pull out of the trap, but Del Adams' blazing bullets found their mark. Hedges saw a flash of flame, followed by a burst of black smoke, and the erstwhile German leader followed in the wake of his departed comrades.

Of the dozen Spads that had zoomed off the tarmac that morning, only two besides the bullet-riddled ships piloted by Billy Hedges and Del Adams reached the tarmac, although two more cracked up on the right side of the lines. However, as a menace in the sector, von Steuben had been completely obliterated. Billy Hedges stumbled into the headquarters shack to find Del holding the phone.

"Here, take this," barked the blood-streaked C.O. "Call up Colonel Macey and tell him I'm ready to be shipped home as a stimulant to recruiting. Tell him that as a leader I may be a washout,

but that I've just washed out von Steuben and his pack of wolves. And you might as well tell him that while you've been safely tucked away in cushions, I've been hunting von Steuben *alone*, day after day, so that kids like you would have a chance to live. Go ahead and tell him."

Billy Hedges took the instrument, "Hedges speaking, sir. Yes, sir, I think that is correct. . . . Yes, sir, von Steuben's outfit. . . . I'm sorry, colonel, but that order you gave me to give to Captain Adams—well, I lost it. Would it trouble you to make out another? Yes, sir, I'll be glad to forget it." He hung up.

"What order were you talking about?" demanded Del Adams.

Hedges dropped wearily into a chair. "I didn't send for Colonel Macey, Del. He

came here with an order relieving you of your command. It was my fault, Del. I knew why you were tightening up. It was to save me. I suspected you were trying to get von Steuben by yourself—running foolish chances while everyone was saying you had lost your courage, just to make it easier for me, not only because of myself, but for Lois—and Dorothy. You can't fool me. You still love her—that scarf—"

"Here, kid, take a drink of this. You're all in—and no wonder. But you're a scrapper, kid. Atta boy!"

"Colonel Macey had been getting reports about the scrap, Del; and those things I said to you—"

"I know, kid. It was just to get me fighting mad—and you did. We finished von Steuben. Here, take another hooker, a stiff one."

Shoot That Picture and Shoot It Right

If a picture is worth taking it is worth taking well. But you don't have to be a professional photographer to record those scenes you don't want to forget. Not if you read

EVERYDAY PHOTOGRAPHY MAGAZINE

The new September issue, like all the others, contains a variety of articles on all phases of photography for the amateur. They are written by experts especially for you. Here is a partial lineup.

THERE'S MORE THAN ONE RIGHT WAY, by Victor De Palma

BUILDING A 1-SHOT COLOR CAMERA, by R. S. Howard

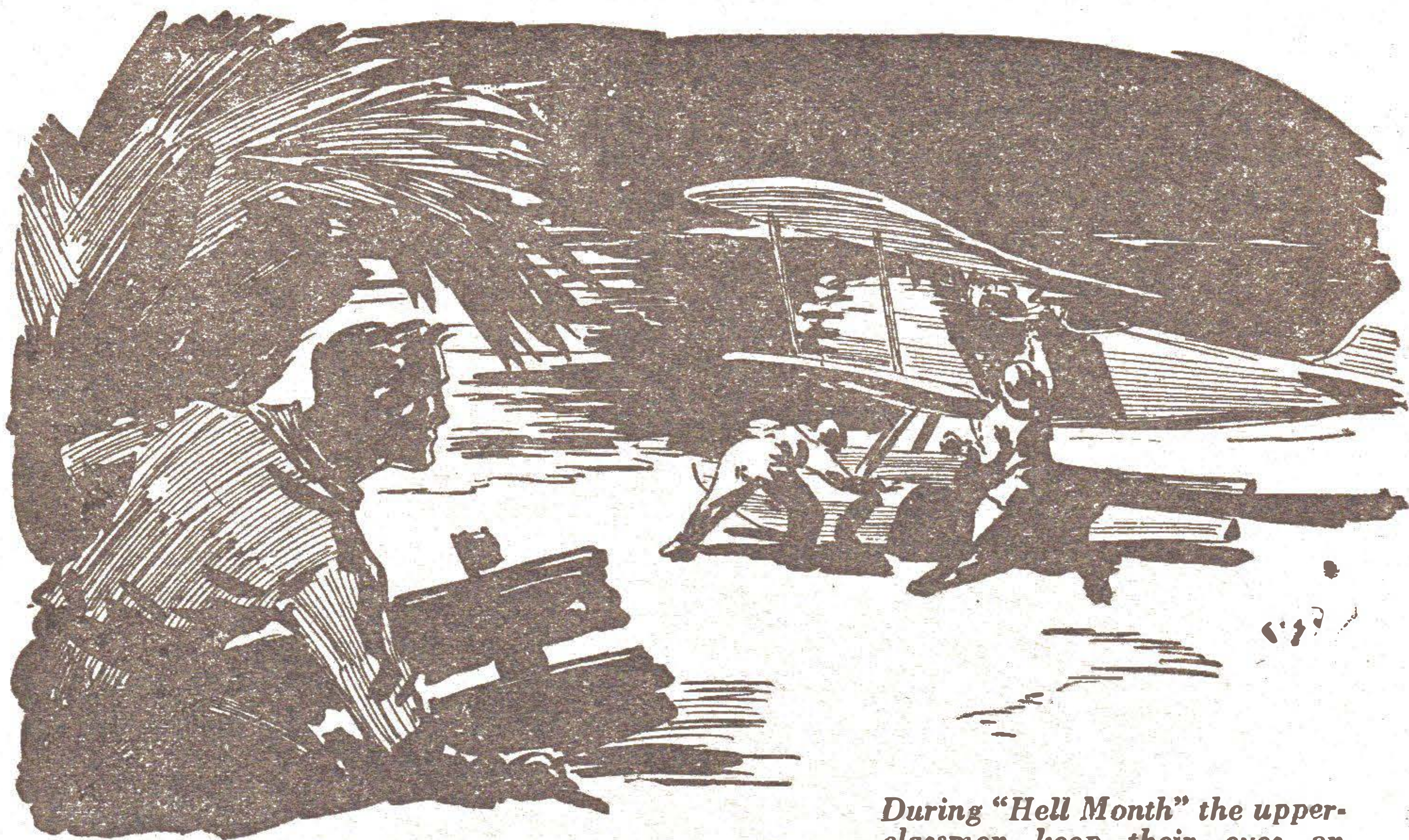
WHEN IS IT IN FOCUS?, by Mario Scacheri

TOP-NOTCHERS IN PHOTOGRAPHY, by E. R. Bennett

THE MAGIC OF INFRA-RED, by John Harman

PLUS—many other interesting articles, a Photo Forum of fine pictures, kamera kinks, and several departments which are mines of new and useful information.

15c At All Newsstands



During "Hell Month" the upperclassmen keep their eyes on you continuously.

"Dodo" Dilemma

By DAVID C. COOKE

"ON THE DOUBLE, you Mister! . . . Fall in. Make it snappy, FALL IN. Don't you understand orders, Mister? . . . Drag in that gut . . . Pop it out! NOT your gut—your chest! Are you in a storm, Mister? POP IT OUT! More; MORE! Aren't you eager, Mister? HAUL THAT BEER-BELLY BACK IN!"

That's the brand of greeting you'd get if you were one of the lucky few who make the trip to Randolph Field, Texas—"The West Point of the Air"—each year to take military flight instruction at the expense of Uncle Sam. But that's only the beginning! The upperclassmen hound the poor "Dodos"—as the fledglings are called—day and night until it's just about all they can do to stand up

under the torment of "Hell Month." For the first portion of those tough four weeks you'd get something like this every hour of the day:

Clanging bells that mean "Fall in for drill" . . . more bells, "Fall in for fatigue" . . . Those damn bells again, "Room inspection in five minutes."

You then hurry at break-neck speed back to the barracks to be positive that everything is in ship-shape order. But

those upperclassmen can always find *something* wrong or out of place *somewhere*.

"Dust in the drawers. You're gigged, Mister! . . . "Raunchy shoe-shine and spot on the spread. You're gigged! . . . Raunchy crease in pants. You're gigged, Mister! . . . Raunchy haircut, raunchy shave, raunchy—"

If you "Dodos" are "Eager" to stop "Bunk Flying" and "Fly the Mail" without being caught in a "Storm," this peppy feature article about the "Misters" at the "Country Club" will not be "Raunchy" with you. What we really mean is that the Flying Cadets at Randolph Field have to learn a brand new lingo—and we don't mean Esperanto!

A Rib-Tickling Fact Article!

That's all you hear all day long: "Raunchy . . . You're gigged, Mister! . . . Take off, you Mister! . . . On the double—you heard me, ON THE DOUBLE! . . . Wipe off that grin! . . . Are you proud to be here? Well, suck in that gut!"

All in all, though, it's not a bad life. You're razed high and low by the natty upperclassmen. Sure! But after a while it sinks in and you don't seem to mind it so much. And just as soon as you show any indications of adapting yourself to the hard life—the upperclassmen invent other hardships to keep you on your toes all through the day and night!

They concoct and carry out drills in the dead of night on how to make up a G.I. bed so that the top is as smooth as a billiard table. Drills to illustrate the proper care of your Springfield rifle. Drills in which they bark commands at you to "Haul it in and pop it out." And there are drills in which you are required to stand at attention in complete silence for time that seems limitless.

Even out on the field you have no respite from the ever dogging commands of the upperclassmen. You are never allowed to talk to another Dodo except in your barracks, and if you so much as utter a syllable to one of them when an upperclassman is near you are gigged. And if an airplane passes by while you are standing in ranks out on the field the cry goes up to "DUCK!"

You then have to kneel down, touch your forehead to the ground, and keep it there until the ship passes out of sight—even though it might be several hundred feet up and miles away.

Still, however, you take it with only a gritting of your teeth. Meanwhile, Dodos are being washed out every day for defects that were not discovered by the medical examiners, and you don't

want to be among them. No matter how bad it might be at the field under the constant and relentless surveillance of the blue-uniformed upperclassmen, you don't want to be washed out. No matter how tough it may be, it could never be as bad as being among those who have to ride in "The Grey Ghost."

BUT after you go through those four long weeks of Hell Month and eventually begin to fly in the PT's (Primary Trainers) you will look back and think that it won't be too long before you'll be handing out similar commands to the next bunch of Dodos that comes along. Then you'll find yourself mentally searching back through that Satanic month for expressions that the upperclassmen used on you. Yes, they'll be mighty handy to fire at those dumb Dodos that will be coming along shortly.

All told, the terms you'll

remember will be something like this: *A-Stage*—The first four months of primary training—conducted on the slowest and safest ships at the field; *B-Stage*—The second four months, which consists of basic training. Flying Cadets on B-Stage are upperclassmen and are virtually in charge of training the Dodos, exclusive of flying (incidentally, you're in this class when you give the poor fledglings holy hell); *Biscuit Gun*—An imaginary appliance which is said to be rolled out on the flying field to shoot biscuits and other food up to the Dodos who have made several approaches to the drome and over-shot on each attempt to land; *Blinders*—The mail orderly, a lowerclassman of the Cadet Detachment, must shield his eyes with his hand while collecting the upperclassmen's mail; *Bunk Flying*—Talking aviation while in the barracks; *Bird Dodging*—When a lowerclassman dances with an upperclassman's date; *Black Wednesday*—



Calisthenics with rifles on that day; *Blowers*—The "B" Company Cadets.

Cadet Windows—San Antonio girls who fill the role of college widows and empty the Flying Cadets' pockets on week-ends; *Country Club*—Just the expression that is given to good ol' Randolph Field, where all primary and basic instruction is given; *Cadet Widow*—Since a Cadet is not allowed to marry during service, this name is given to any young lady who has known Flying Cadets for several classes; *City of Wings*—Another term for Randolph Field, usually used during rest periods of Infantry drill.

Dodo—This is about the most important word—it refers to a bird that can't fly. And when he does, he flies backwards to keep his tailfeathers cool. New Flying Cadets are Dodos during Hell Month. This name is retained until a lowerclassman reaches the Basic Stage; *Dodo Tom*—The janitor of "B" Company, who is new at his job—having held it for only eighteen years. Dodo Tom is still in service—but he's never been up in an airplane; *Drive it into the hangar*—Means let's stop Bunk Flying; *Dawn Patrolling*—A Dodo is said to be Dawn Patrolling when he arises before reveille.

Eager—is the model Dodo, the fellow who was probably never late for Sunday school when he was a kid. The over-conscientious or even boot-licking type. *Flying the Mail*—Almost every evening Dodos are forced to form *en masse* in the shape of an airplane, with arms outspread, and sprint about the Cadet area, imitating the sound of an aircraft engine. They keep it up until they are about to drop from exhaustion.

Gig—A demerit. Acquired for dust at room inspection, for poor shoe-shine, shave, hair-cut, or brass-shine, or for improper answers, or because an upperclassman doesn't like the way your face is fastened on. All in all, there is no set rule for handing out Gigs—they often come when an upperclassman doesn't have anything else to say; *G.I.*—Government Issue. You can literally report to Randolph Field in shorts, for the Government provides everything from G.I. underwear, shaving kit, and stationery, to training

planes; *Gun*—To ask a waiter in the mess hall for a second filling of a dish. Example: "Gun the potatoes"—meaning to have the spuds replenished pronto; *Gunner*—One of the lowerclassmen who sits at the end of the tables in the mess hall and is charged with keeping all dishes filled to the brim; *Gig Getter*—A rifle which, in spite of all the time, effort, and energy spent on it, fails to pass inspection; *Get Eager*—To strive to the utmost—in fact, sometimes to the near-breaking point.

Hell Month—A Dodo's first month at Randolph. If anything, an understatement; *Highpockets*—The term applied by the "B" Company Misterys to those of "A" Company who are taller; *Homing Device*—a furlough or leave of absence; *Hi! Ho! Silver!*—No, not the Lone Ranger—just a phrase used by the mail orderly to announce collection of mail; *Holy Flaw*—An expression of extreme surprise, disgust, joy—or just plain expression; *Hold it down*—Suppress the noise. This term is used throughout the day in many various forms—such as in class rooms, mess hall, at drill, or just to tell a Dodo to shut up; *H.P.*—Abbreviation for Hot Pilot—one who is exceptionally good.

Mister—Formal title of a Flying Cadet. Chiefly applied to Dodos; *Push Button Pilots*—Those Cadets who are assigned to Flights using PT-13's or PT-11's for training, as differentiated from those who train on the older PT-3's. The PT-3's are considered the more difficult; *Power Birds of War*—Another name for all Flying Cadets; *Pop it Out*—Stick your chest out until it threatens to burst wide open.

Raunchy—Lousy. Everything a Dodo says, thinks, does, or wears during Hell Month. Also anything dirty or in bad shape; *Rats*—Balls of lint that suddenly appear on the floor—most noticeable when a Cadet is standing at attention during an inspection of quarters; *Roll up your flaps*—Stop talking; *Riding the Beam*—Gazing at the ceiling after violating some custom in the mess hall.

Storm—Mental confusion. A name applied to the condition one is in when he

is excited and doesn't know what he is doing. No stone is left unturned to keep the Dodos in a perpetual Storm during Hell Month; *Spin in*—To fall down, go into a Storm, go to bed, or take a nap; *Snap to*—Come to attention. The characteristic pose of a Dodo when not in bed; *Sound off*—Speak. If at mess, recite in order your name, home town, college, fraternity, athletic experience, previous military experience, previous flying time, and for what you are famous (all Dodos are said to be famous for something). For each omission you get three Gigs; *Stoop*—Flying Cadets' rooms are between two hallways. One is the inside Stoop; the other, a long, open gallery, is the outside Stoop; *Shining your rump*—Showing off, particularly in an airplane; *Sandblower*—The term applied by “A” Company Misters to those in “B” Company, the latter being shorter in height to give the company uniformity on parade; *Six and Twenty Tootsie*—Any young lady who is responsible for a Cadet returning late after a week-end leave, meaning six Gigs and twenty Tours; *Slug*—Same as Gig, a demerit; *Sugar Report*—A letter from a Cadet's girl friend—these are sometimes laid open for public inspection by the upperclassmen; *Suck it in*—Draw in your stomach until your backbone almost shows plainly against your G.I.

Tours—Hours spent pulling weeds or confined to your room on week-ends. Tours are the penalty for too many Gigs. Can also be an hour of marching on the ramp with rifle and white gloves; *Take-off*—Move on the double; *Taxi up*—Come here; *The Jeep*—The Link Trainer for instrument flight training; *The Grey Ghost*—The Stage Commander's ship, in which you take your last ride before being Washed Out. The chances of riding in The Grey Ghost during the first three months is better than even.

Wash Out—To be eliminated from flight training, usually for failure to progress fast enough; *Washing Machine*—The Flight Commander's ship; *Whoof-in*—To tell a tall tale about flying; *What the Horrible Hell*—An expression of extreme surprise. More expressive than Holy Flaw.

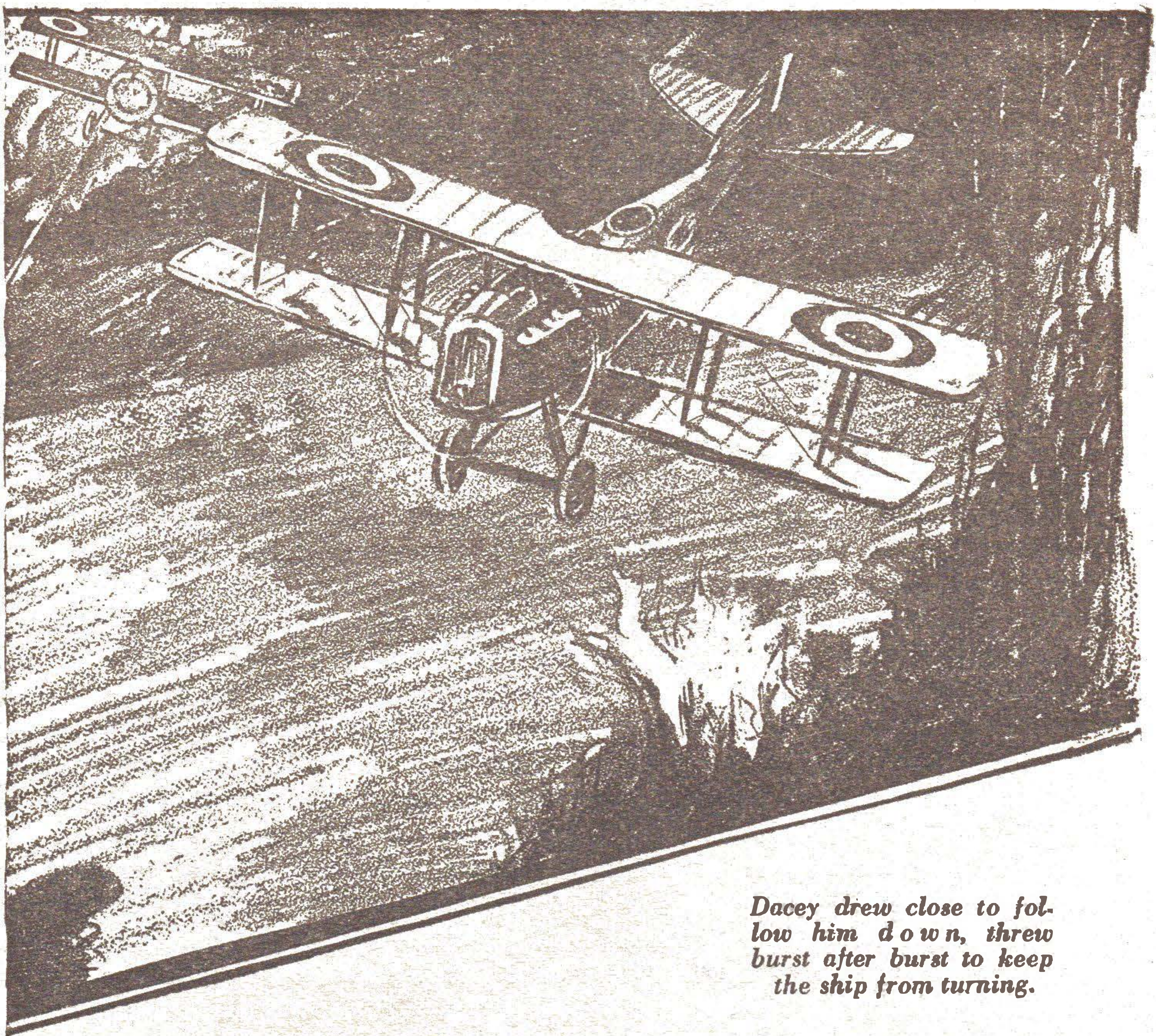
THAT'S just about the entire list that you'll hand out to the new Dodos that come to the field during your stay. Of course, you'll get the same thing yourself during Hell Month and will hate every last expression—in fact, you'll probably curse the Cadets who concocted them in the first place. But when you eventually become an upperclassman and meet the train at San Antonio to welcome new Dodos, you'll find that the long-hated phrases will come to you as natural expressions and you'll really enjoy seeing the greenhorns being hustled about as you were not many months before.

So until the time comes that you actually become one of those lucky Dodos that pass the rigid inspections and tests that are necessary to become a Flying Cadet, it might be well to memorize every last one of the above expressions so that you'll be prepared and will not get too many Gigs that will send you on Tours and thus cause you to miss those happy week-ends down at San Antonio.

But let's back throttle for a few more moments just to see how adept you are by now. And if you just jumped off the train at San Antonio, what would you do if an upperclassman hurled the following at you?

“Mister, quit birddogging and roll up your flaps. Let's take off for the Country Club, because we're not push button pilots and are liable to wind up in the washing machine if we don't spin in early enough to sound off.”





Dacey drew close to follow him down, threw burst after burst to keep the ship from turning.

Spad of Treachery

By CHARLES V. KERR

Author of "No Victory For Revenge," "The Pilot in Spad 24," etc.

Just fifteen minutes in the air—that was all the captured Boche needed. And Lieutenant Dacey, the one man who knew it, couldn't stop him! But Dacey could drink—and he could talk. Which he did—only to find that he was fated to match a flow of cognac-dizzy words against a flow of deadly lead from his own C.O.'s guns!

"I'M part alligator and part horse. When I walk, thunder and lightning run along at my heels like puppies, and when I blow my breath, flowers wither. I can stand on tiptoe and snatch the Boche out of the sky with my bare hands. And if you don't shut up and let me go to bed, I'll cut your guts up into insulation for ignition cables and

paint Indian signs on my fuselage with your blood."

Having thus delivered himself, Lieutenant Dacey rocked on his heels and stared into the somewhat fishy eyes of Captain Parsons, his squadron commander.

"You're drunk," the captain accused him.

"Very drunk—and what of it?" conceded Dacey. "What else is there to do but get drunk? Look at it pour. It's rained that way for three days. It's the second flood. Captain, I advise you to chop up your operations office and use the pieces to build an ark. It's never going to stop raining."

"You're not only drunk, you're insubordinate," Parsons charged.

"Listen, I wouldn't be insubordinate if you knew as much about commanding a squadron as you do about preaching," answered Dacey, steadying himself. "Why couldn't you let me go sleep it off instead of calling me in here for a lecture on my sins? Stop trying to make a day school for deacons out of this outfit and try being human."

"You're under arrest. Go to your quarters," snapped the captain.

"And if I don't?"

"I'll have you marched off to the guardhouse."

"All right, but remember this: I was on this Front months before you poked your weasel nose around the bend in the road and crept up here—and I'll be here a long time after you've dragged yourself back where you came from," Dacey told his commander. He turned on his heel and walked out of operations—not altogether steadily.

Only half-undressed, he threw himself on his cot and dropped into a stupor that was half-sleep and half-coma. While he slept, the squadron buzzed.

There had been an orderly in operations when Dacey threatened to adapt the captain's digestive organs to such a picturesque use and he found opportunity to confide in an ordnance corporal. The corporal told others, among them a crew chief, and this sergeant took the officer whose plane he groomed into his confidence. By supper time the story, much distorted and amplified through repetition, was common property among both enlisted men and pilots.

Among the latter opinion was divided. Some held that Dacey had gone too far—even considering that his adversary was Captain Parsons. Others—and they were in the majority—took the attitude

that it was high time somebody told the C. O. exactly how objectionable he was.

Parsons, thin of face, pale-eyed and slightly stooped, had come to the squadron a month earlier. His unpopularity had come into being almost at once. News of it had spread rapidly through Wing and into both high and low places. Prior to April, 1917, Parsons had been commandant of a military school conducted for the usually turbulent and undisciplined sons of the wealthy. His trouble lay in his inability to forget that he now commanded a squadron of fighting men and not a corps of callow youngsters. The discovery that the same methods he had used at the academy would not work in a fighting squadron failed to stop him from trying to use them.

Dacey, bored by inactivity, had gone to the village and drunk too much. He was on his way home, proceeding peacefully enough, when he met the captain. Parsons, instead of pretending not to notice the lieutenant's condition, and thereafter keeping an eye on him to see that it did not become a habit, made an issue of the incident.

NEXT morning a miracle happened. After three sodden days during which it had rained almost unceasingly, the sun rose in a clear sky. Dacey awoke, wished he had something good for a mild headache, and then gave a whoop that aroused the other three men in the cubicle.

"Flying weather," he announced.

"What woke you up?" asked a pilot named Beck. "We thought you were dead. This morning we were going to auction off your stuff. Do you know you've been sleeping since yesterday afternoon—right through supper and everything?"

"The young and innocent sleep soundly," Dacey informed him as he began pulling on his boots.

The others, as they dressed, eyed him curiously. He had become a man apart, a sort of heroic freak. They wondered whether he remembered what he had told Parsons. Dacey did.

"The Old Man'll pout when he sees me fresh as a daisy," he observed as he set-

bled his cap over one ear. "He thinks I'm pretty wicked and ought to be made to learn four extra pages in my Latin grammar. Maybe he'll make me write my name on the blackboard five hundred times."

"Maybe he'll jerk your belt, too," suggested Beck. "If I heard the story right, you talked yourself into trouble."

"What'd you hear I said?" Dacey wanted to know.

"That you'd stretch the Old Man's hide over a petrol drum and use it for a tom-tom, and that you'd take the wires off your Spad and rig it with his guts."

"Which only goes to show how stories get exaggerated in the telling," sighed Dacey. "All I told him was that I'd use his intestines for ignition cable insulation and paint my fuselage with his blood. I remember as clearly as though it were only yesterday."

"It was," grunted a man struggling with boots that had become obstinate with repeated soakings.

"Couldn't have been," called Dacey, starting for the mess hut. "Such a glorious morning couldn't possibly come so soon after that old home week for cloud-bursts that we were holding when I went to sleep."

Before breakfast was over, mechanics had rolled the ships out through the puddles and the air drummed with the thunder of Hispano-Suizas warming up. The sun was bright and warm, the sky unbroken blue. The Boche also would be chafing for action, and the men who bolted a hasty breakfast with Dacey were anxious to provide it.

Dacey hurried through his oatmeal and coffee and went out to his ship. He fished his flying togs out of the cockpit and was pulling them on when Captain Parsons approached. The captain eyed him for a moment and then spoke:

"You are under arrest, Lieutenant Dacey," he said. "Until your status changes, you will not fly."

Dacey stood dumbfounded. It had not occurred to him that the captain had meant it when he placed him under arrest.

"For getting that little edge on yesterday afternoon?" he asked.

"For insubordination."

"Oh," said Dacey, relieved. "You mean the things I said. I was talking large and I suppose I might have been offensive. If I was, of course I'll be only too glad to apologize."

"It is rather past the time for apologies," Parsons informed him coldly. "I shall bring charges."

"Very well," said Dacey, "I didn't realize it was that serious. To show you that my heart is in the right place, however, I'll fly, anyway. The way things are right now, a man worth his salt would turn out for duty even if he was going to be hung as soon as he got back."

"You will remain on the ground until after the court-martial," Parsons told him brittlely.

Dacey clenched his fists and placed them on his hips. "Listen, Parsons," he began, "yesterday I was drunk and not responsible for what I said. Today I'm perfectly sober and I'm weighing my words carefully. You are the champion damned fool, the world's foremost incompetent in all weights and classes. You're a washout. You're a write-off. You're the high-priest of idiocy and you've got as much business commanding a squadron—or for that matter—a latrine-digging detail, as I would have running a convent.

"Do you realize," he thundered, "that we're stripped for men? Do you know that every outfit in the sector is in the same condition? Did it ever occur to you that G.H.Q. needs every ship in the air that can be got off of the ground, and that any C. O. who grounds a pilot simply because he used a little hard language when he was drunk ought to be shot for treason?"

"Your arrest," said Parsons, "is no longer technical. I'm having you locked up in the guardhouse!"

THE guardhouse was an unpainted board building divided into two rooms. One was the guardroom, the other a cell. The cell, used principally for temporary incarceration of obstreperous enlisted men, was furnished with four bunks and ventilated by a single window, over which had been crisscrossed lengths of barbed wire. Breaking out would not

have been much of a job, but men who got themselves locked up there had little reason to try it.

Dacey sat on a chair, loaned by the sergeant of the guard, and considered his plight. It was maddening, but nothing to worry about. He was sure that the court-martial would not be severe if he was found guilty. Dacey had a good record and Parsons' failings were pretty well known. The worst that would happen, he thought, would be a fine of a few francs and probably a recommendation that he be transferred. A transfer from Parsons' squadron would be worth a little trouble, he decided.

His ponderings were cut short by an uproar in the guard room. Some one had driven up in an automobile, and he recognized Lieutenant Tupper's voice. Tupper was the officer of the day. Dacey heard him asking for men and presently the car roared away again. From his barbed-wire-latticed window, Dacey could see the car bounding along the ruts that led to the highway. Tupper sat beside the driver, and there were two enlisted men in the back seat.

"Most unmilitary," commented the prisoner. "Dear Captain Parsons wouldn't like that. It's lucky for Tupper the patrol is still out." Then he shouted through the door to learn what was going on.

"Somebody brought down a Boche behind our lines and Lieutenant Tupper went out to bring him in," the sergeant of the guard informed him. "A railroad artillery outfit telephoned operations."

"Looks as if I'll have company," murmured Dacey.

An hour passed and the squadron came in. It was half an hour after that when Dacey saw Tupper's car return. A man in gray sat in the back seat between Tupper and one of the guards. The car went toward operations, but in a short time it pulled up in front of the guard house again. Presently the cell door opened and Tupper escorted the man in gray inside.

"Company for you," grinned the officer of the day. "Lieutenant Dacey, meet Lieutenant Pfeiffer. Beck winged him over behind Pont-à-Mousson and landed alongside to keep the S.O.S. or somebody's re-

mount depot from claiming credit for the victory."

Dacey bowed slightly. "Sorry I can't offer you something better in the way of hospitality, but about the best I can do is borrow another chair from the sergeant of the guard. You see, I'm not staying here by choice myself," he said, and turned to Tupper. "They didn't keep Lieutenant Pfeiffer at operations very long."

Tupper smiled slightly. "A colonel from G.H.Q. is coming up here this afternoon to inspect the outfit, and you know what that does to Parsons. He's making a nervous wreck out of himself running around in a circle shouting orders. He said he'd have to put off calling Intelligence and talking to the prisoner until later."

"Won't I be all set with G.H.Q. when the colonel puts his nose in this dump?" mourned Dacey. "Still, I'd rather be here than in Parsons' boots if this Brass Hat discovers he's letting a prisoner lie around without bothering to have Intelligence talk to him."

Tupper smiled again and left them.

"Speak much English?" Dacey asked his cellmate.

"*Nein.*"

Dacey realized that Pfeiffer believed he was in the cell posing as a prisoner in order to win the German's confidence and probably obtain vital information. He smiled whimsically. "If we don't talk shop would it improve your English any?" he inquired. "On the level, I'm here because I bawled out the C. O."

"It is nice weather," the German observed solemnly.

"Umm, I thought you did," laughed Dacey, and offered Pfeiffer a cigarette.

Pfeiffer accepted. "I guess I won't be telling military secrets if I admit that over on our side the tobacco is very bad," he said.

THEREAFTER, they talked of many things that had no significance except in a personal way. Pfeiffer said he had been back at the Front only a week, having spent three months in a hospital as the result of a combat with a French-

man. Dacey told him that he had shot down four Germans and added that he hoped none of them had been Pfeiffer's personal friends. Presently a corporal brought them their dinner and said that a plane they had heard landing was a De Havilland in which the colonel and a staff lieutenant had arrived.

"You know, Lieutenant," said Pfeiffer as he helped himself to a third boiled potato, "it is very sad that I must stay here when I could do the Fatherland so much good if I could leave for only one little quarter of an hour this afternoon."

"What could you do in fifteen minutes?" inquired Dacey.

"It occurs to me that if a man were to fly an enemy ship in an enemy squadron during a review such as your people will hold this afternoon he could do a great deal of damage."

"Yeah?"

"Think of it, flying in an unsuspecting formation and suddenly going—what is the word?—oh, yes, berserk. If, for instance, I could get into a Spad and go up with your squadron this afternoon, I could shoot down at least three ships before the rest could gather their wits sufficiently to realize what was happening. And even then I'd still have a chance to get safely away."

"It would be a great thing—for you," admitted Dacey. "If it's ever my turn to be a prisoner, I'll remember the idea."

"Well, it can't be, so there is no use tantalizing myself," shrugged Pfeiffer, and turned the talk to other subjects. The corporal came back for their empty dishes, and presently they heard planes warming up on the line. The aerial portion of the inspection evidently was about to begin.

Pfeiffer and Dacey stood up, Pfeiffer stretching and yawning. Suddenly his arm shot out like a piston and a hard Teutonic fist caught Dacey squarely on the jaw.

The cell became spangled with shooting fire and spun like a pinwheel. Then everything turned pitch dark and Dacey felt himself falling miles and miles. When he opened his eyes, he was trussed tightly with strips torn from blankets. A rung

broken from a chair to which he was tied was pulled hard back between his aching jaws and held there by another strip of blanket knotted behind his head.

He could see Pfeiffer, back toward him, at the window. The German was doing something to the barbed wire. Any sound he might be making was more than muffled by the thunder of engines as plane after plane rolled across the field and took off. Pfeiffer turned around. The window was cleared of wire and he tossed a pair of pliers on the bunk.

"Oh, you're awake," he smiled. "Sorry to have been so rough, but it was a matter of military importance." He saw Dacey looking at the pliers. "Your somewhat stupid captain hurried the men searching me so much that they overlooked the pliers I usually carry tucked in my boot," he said.

WITH a deep bow for a good-bye, Pfeiffer wriggled out through the window, ripping his tunic on the few dangling strands of wire that remained. Dacey strained and struggled. His bonds refused to give. Inch by inch, in an agony of impatience, he hitched the chair toward the door to the guardroom. It took an eternity, and when he got there he spent another agonizing period getting the chair turned back toward the door that he might pound with his head—the only part of him free to move.

He banged hard, despite the throbbing ache in his brain that was caused by Pfeiffer's jarring blows. Each thump on the door increased the ache. The members of the guard were outside, watching the take-off, and were slow to hear him.

At last the sergeant opened the door and straightaway turned pale. Snapping open his clasp knife, he slashed away the bonds and removed the gag. Dacey massaged his cramped jaws with his fingers.

"Wasch planes," he managed to say. "Boche gonna steal um."

"Lord of battles!" the sergeant exploded, comprehending the gibberish. "He's stolen it already! That'd be the guy we were wondering about. At the last minute, when everybody else was off, he come running out from a hangar, wear-

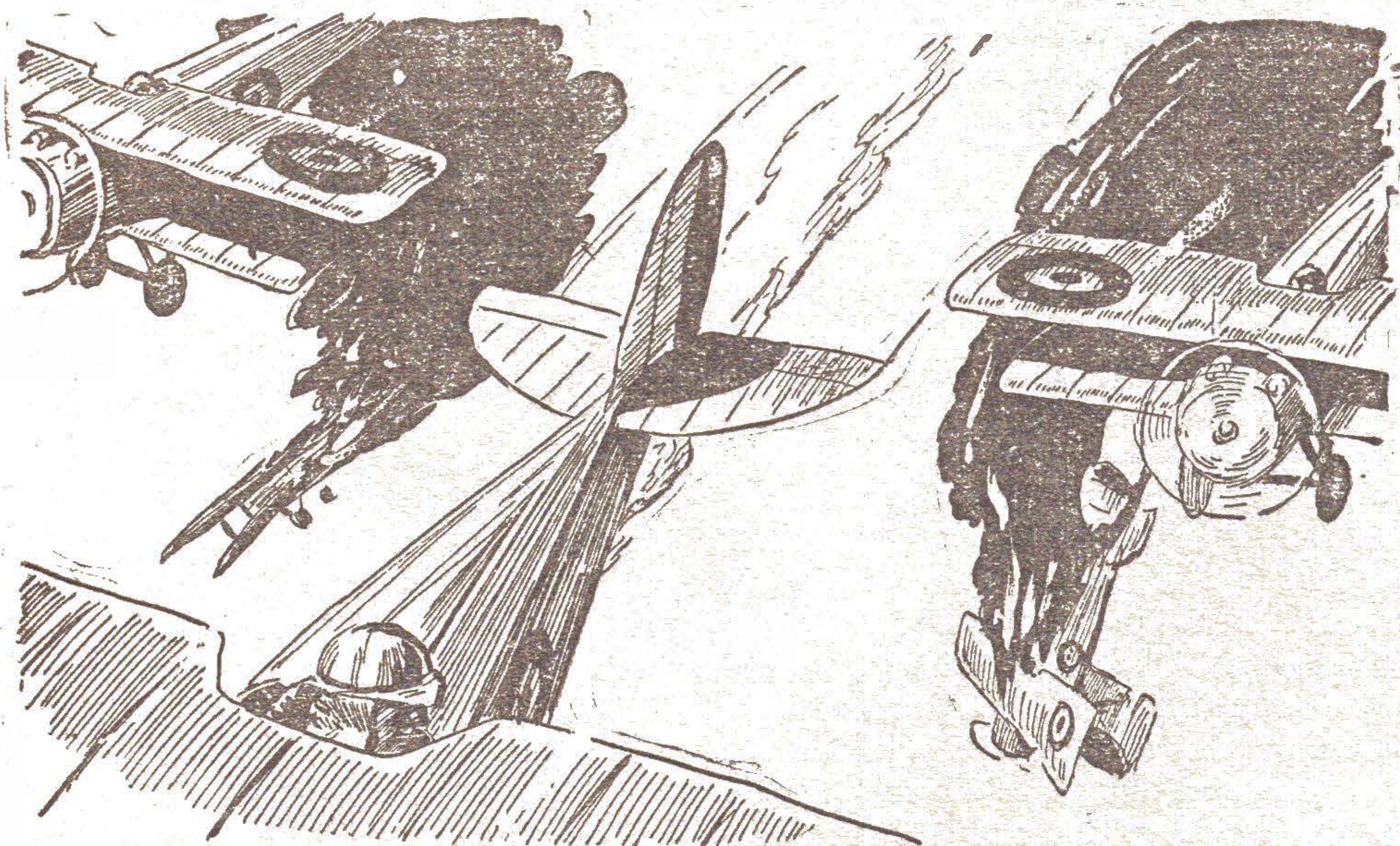
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ing a greaseball's jumpers, and piled into a ship."

Dacey dropped to all fours and catapulted himself through the encircling ring of soldiers, football fashion. With the whole guard relief in pursuit, he dashed toward the pair of ships that remained on the line. One was his own Spad and the other the De Havilland which had brought the colonel to the field. His ship had been warmed up with the rest and the motor still idled. Out of the corner of his eye, as he ran, he saw Tupper and a pair of strange officers standing in front of opera-

craned their necks and waved. Dacey wondered how he could ever find Pfeiffer. Wearing helmet and goggles and crouched in the cockpit of a fast-moving plane, one man looks very much like another.

The lieutenant looked about for a man without goggles, but saw none. Probably, he told himself, the owner of the plane Pfeiffer had stolen followed Dacey's own practice—that is, kept his helmet and goggles in the cockpit ready for hasty take-offs. He felt a moment of panic as he realized he might not be able to identify the German until the man struck his first



tions. Overhead wheeled the squadron, a laggard plane hastening to fall in place.

With the pursuit close upon him, he dived under the nose of the Spad, knocked the chocks aside, came up on the far side, and vaulted into the cockpit. He pushed the throttle open just as the sergeant of the guard reached out for the tail. The sergeant missed his hold and his fingers slid futilely over the elevators as the plane rolled forward.

Holding a tight and perfect formation, the squadron moved west at an easy pace just as Dacey began to climb. He streaked to overtake it before Parsons could turn his formation about and bring it back to the field. Parsons, at the nose of the "V," was not aware of the addition to his squadron. Those at the rear, however,

blow—which doubtless would be fatal to somebody.

While he scanned the formation for a clue, it came about and started back toward the field. Dacey saw that those on the ground had become aware of the situation. Men dashed here and there, and the De Havilland was being cranked. Somebody was trying to signal the squadron down. But if Parsons caught the signal and tried to bring his men in, the German would strike at once, Dacey realized.

Then, at the tip of the opposite echelon, he recognized the markings of Tupper's Spad. Tupper was on the ground with the colonel. Logically this should be the stolen ship. Of course there was a chance that some other pilot might have borrowed it,

but Dacey decided he would have to risk that. He swerved from the formation and cut across, drawing in close beside the Spad.

PARSONS, casting occasional backward glances along the formations, was puzzled. Not only were there two ships in the squadron which he could not account for, but one of them was marring the performance by getting out of place. He was too absorbed in this problem to notice the activity on the ground.

His bewilderment, a few seconds later, turned to horror. Dacey had drawn alongside of Tupper's Spad and Pfeiffer, at its controls, realized that something had gone wrong with his plan. He could not recognize Dacey, but he knew that some one had guessed his treachery. Side by side the two ships dived and then zoomed. Pfeiffer tried to turn his zoom into an Immelmann, but he delayed too long and lacked speed.

The result was a spin from which he pulled out only five hundred feet above the field. Dacey came after him, trying to find the gyrating plane with his tracers. The bursts from his Vickers guns sprayed the field. And as they began to bite the sod, those who had been watching the performance ran for the bomb shelters. Only the De Havilland and its two men braved the fusillade. It was taking off and there was no chance to dodge.

Pfeiffer decided to let well enough alone and call it a day if he could make his escape. Trying to gain altitude, he headed east. Dacey, blessed with the advantage of the upper position, gained rapidly. His tracers again flickered about the fugitive and Pfeiffer decided to fight him off. Executing a chandelle, he charged.

Neither man turned until they were so close that the watchers felt themselves growing taut in expectation of a mad collision. At the last possible moment, Dacey zoomed and Pfeiffer banked about in a flipper turn.

The rest of the squadron, meanwhile, had broken formation, and the ships milled about the embattled pair. Parsons raged. He recognized Dacey's Spad and

jumped at conclusions. Dacey—he made up his mind—had escaped from his cell, bent not only on disrupting the review, but on vengeful murder. The captain believed Dacey capable of anything. That Dacey's adversary was in Tupper's plane convinced Parsons that the officer of the day was trying to recapture the mutineer.

As Dacey nosed down to resume his attack, Parsons dived at him and opened fire. Dacey saw tracers puncture his wing fabric, but had no time to look for their source. Pfeiffer was his quarry and he meant to run him down no matter what else happened. His aching head and growing lump of soreness on his jaw were a great inspiration.

Once more he dived at the German. Again he squeezed the triggers. He could see his tracers coming closer—closer. He moved his rudder a hair to the left and the tracers ripped into the fleeing Spad's tail surfaces.

The ship gave a convulsive buck and dived sharply. It leveled off a moment later, and for a few seconds Pfeiffer held his hands above his head in token of surrender. Dacey ceased firing and the German turned his plane toward the field. The wobbling Spad was so crippled that it left Pfeiffer the choice of a landing or death. Dacey drew in close to follow him down, and once more tracers stabbed through his fabric.

He looked back to see Parsons diving at him, jets of flame rippling at the muzzles of the captain's guns. "It's my neck or his and I'm in the clear on this deal," snarled Dacey. Executing an Immelmann, he roared at the squadron commander—but he did not open fire. As his fingers tightened about the stick triggers, a plane cut between him and the oncoming Spad. It was the De Havilland.

Parsons, flying in a blind fury, tried to dodge around it to get at Dacey, but the two-seater remained in his path, at the risk of a collision with both Spads. Dacey whipped about in a tight turn and slanted down for a landing.

AS he came in, he saw Pfeiffer's riddled ship roll to a stop, to be immediately engulfed by enlisted men. When

he reached the throng and pushed his way through, the sergeant of the guard was holding the German by his tunic collar and threatening to boil him in oil.

"All right, sergeant, turn him loose. He can't get away," laughed Dacey.

Pfeiffer, when the sergeant released his grasp, shook himself and settled his tunic on his shoulders. "It was that damned spin," he growled. "If I hadn't tumbled into that right at the start I'd have made it."

"Not used to Mr. Spad's contraption, I guess," grinned Dacey.

The other ships were landing Parsons' Spad and the colonel's De Havilland in the van. The captain elbowed his way to the center of the group.

"Well, Dacey," he stormed, "this time you've taken enough rope to hang yourself. Treason and attempted murder. You'll swing for this, by God, and I'd like to be the man to spring the trap! Take off that uniform. You're defiling it."

His eyes suddenly fell on Pfeiffer and the bewilderment which had overwhelmed him when he first saw the review going to pieces returned. He gulped, stared at the German and then back at Dacey.

"Listen, you jam and misfire," Dacey told him, "I'm going to kick that withered soul right out of your skinny frame. Nobody ever tried to shoot me in the back and got away with it."

He felt a hearty hand laid on his shoulder and looked around. It was the staff colonel with Tupper beside him. "Damned fine work, boy. Damned fine," he said, "but don't get so excited. I'll handle the part about Parsons shooting at you. What was the idea in trying to shoot Lieutenant Dacey down?" he demanded of the captain, wheeling on him abruptly.

"I—I—there seems to have been a misunderstanding," stammered Parsons.

"You put it mildly," snorted the colonel. "And what was the idea in trying to ram my De Havilland when Tupper and I were trying to help this boy? Was that a misunderstanding, too?"

"Colonel Ross," began Parsons, "I saw Dacey firing at Lieutenant Tupper's Spad and believed he had broken arrest. It was only natural to suppose that Lieutenant

Tupper, as officer of the day, was trying to rearrest him."

Colonel Ross interrupted. "You've got an almighty vivid imagination," he informed the squadron commander. "You must think Lieutenant Dacey is a pretty desperate character. What the devil did he do to get himself such a reputation?"

Parsons felt that at last his day in court had come. He launched into a recital of his altercations with the lieutenant, omitting no details, and repeating word for word the remarks Dacey had made about the use of guts for insulation cables and blood for fuselage paint.

"You arrested him for drinking too much, eh?" mused the colonel when the story of Dacey's insubordination was told. "Did his drinking incapacitate him—keep him from duty, that is?"

"It would have if there had been any flying yesterday," said Parsons.

"But there *wasn't* any flying. There couldn't possibly have been any flying yesterday. And if there had been, Dacey wouldn't have been in the village sampling cognac, would he?"

"Yes, sir—that is, no, sir," murmured Parsons.

"Then why the devil make such a stew about it? And on top of that, why ground him this morning? Do you happen to have any idea how badly off we are right now? As squadron commander, do you by any chance know that we need every ship in the air?"

"But discipline—"

Colonel Ross snorted. "The only discipline you have to worry about, captain, is the kind that keeps men flying and fighting. Did Dacey ever refuse to do that? Was he ever drunk when he should have been on patrol?"

PARSONS shook his head. Colonel Ross turned to Pfeiffer. "And what have you got to say for yourself?"

"Only that I'm properly grateful to Lieutenant Dacey for letting me land after he'd shot half the tail off of that Spad," the German told him. "After the smash I gave his face he'd have been pretty nearly justified in finishing me off. I should like to ask that he be cred-

ited with another official victory for forcing me down. After all, it was a real fight—and another victory will make him an ace.”

“Who is this man?” Colonel Ross inquired of Parsons.

“He’s a man Lieutenant Beck brought down this morning,” the captain told him.

“I know that. Tupper told me. I mean, where is he from? What’s his *Jagdstaffel*? Where has he been?”

“He hasn’t been questioned about those things,” Parsons murmured.

“You’ve had him around here since morning and all you’ve done is to lock him up in a cardboard jail? What did you expect him to do, sit down and brood?”

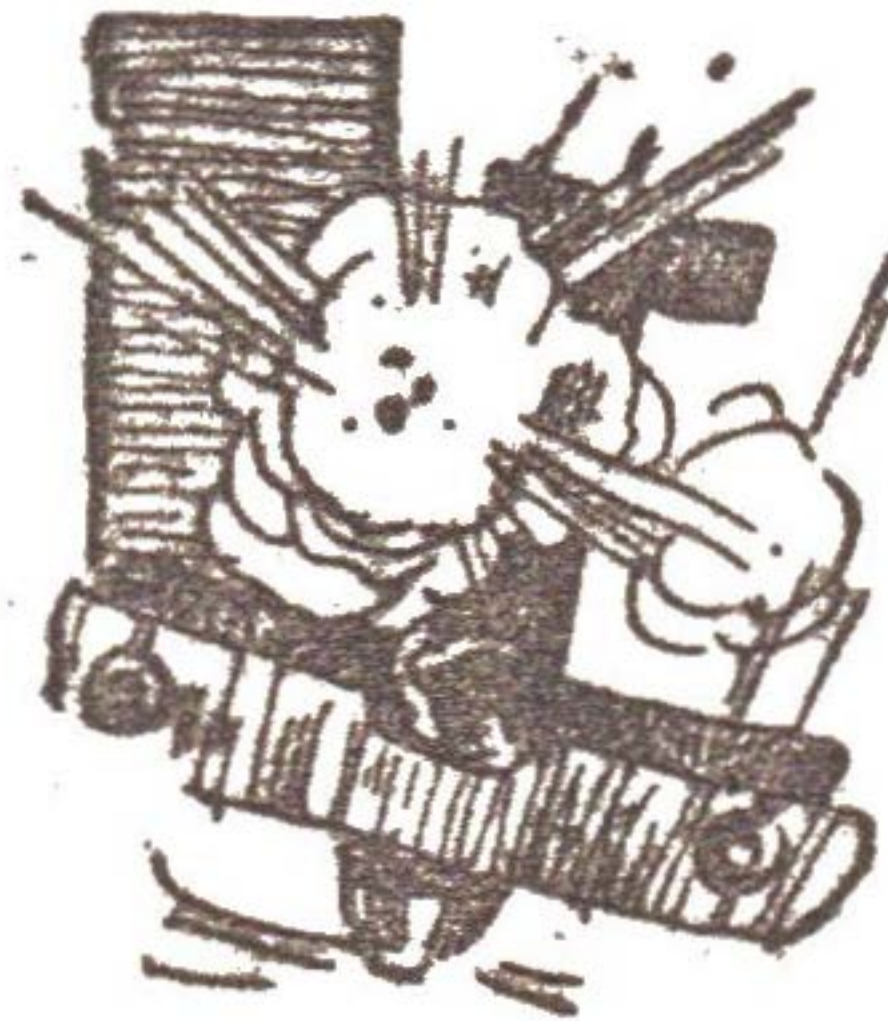
Parsons made no answer.

“Don’t worry about losing face with your men, captain,” the colonel told him. “You don’t have to worry about your standing with this outfit. I’m relieving you. You are an incompetent.”

Captain Parsons packed his field locker and was gone even before Colonel Ross had finished his inspection. The colonel’s last act was to deliver a brief address to the pilots.

“I am leaving Lieutenant Dacey in temporary command,” he told them in conclusion. “And I believe I shall be able to have the appointment confirmed. He is the squadron’s only Ace, and that counts for a good deal. Then, too, I have seen him in action and I find he thinks fast and fights well—even though he does spray visiting brass hats with Vickers lead while they’re trying to get a two-seater off.”

He turned to Dacey. “And should the time ever come, Lieutenant, when you need an ignition cable insulator or fuselage paint of the unique variety you suggested to Captain Parsons, just let me know. I would very much like to get it for you in person.”



Army Corporal Receives Medal

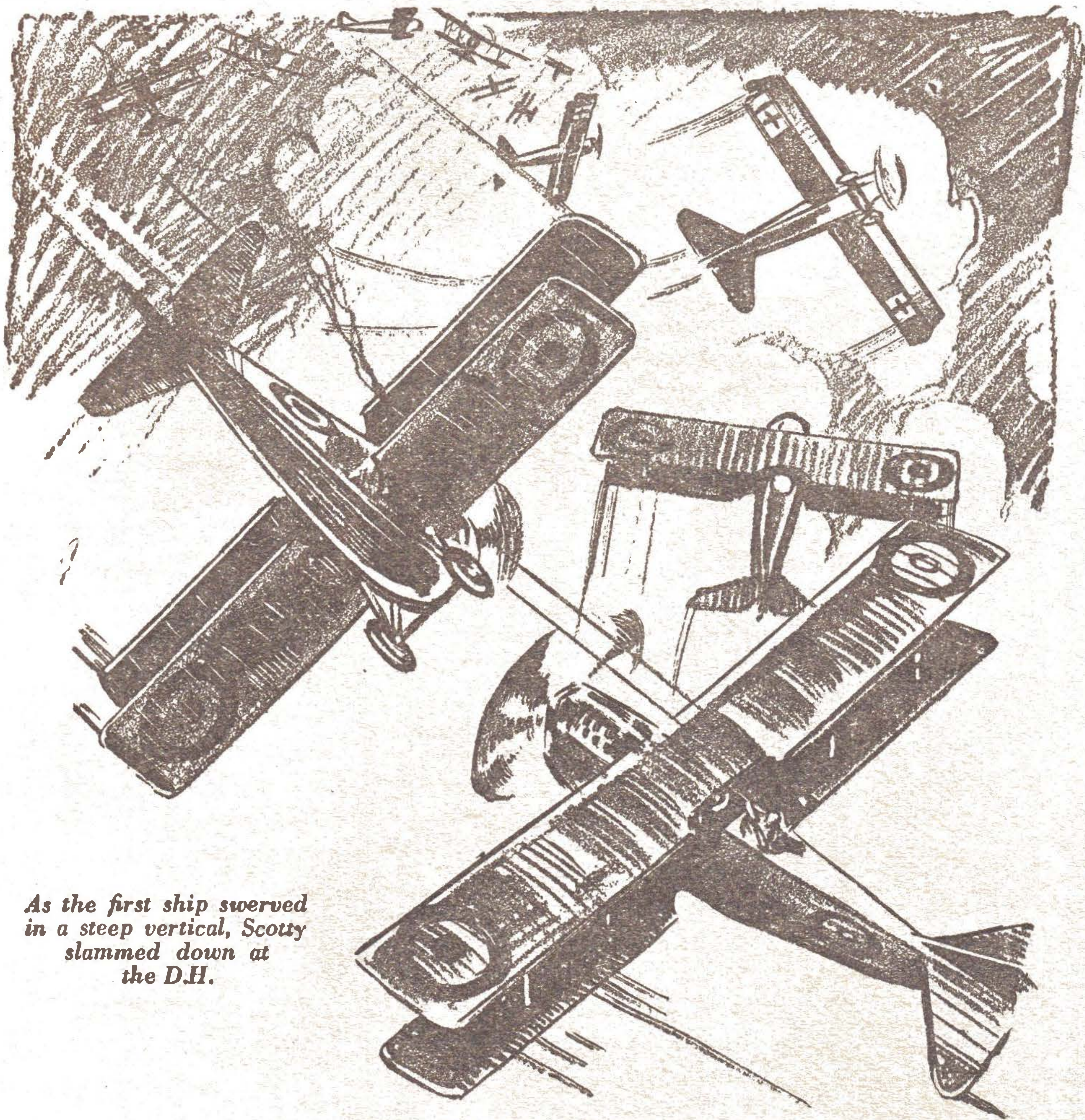
MORE than 1,800 Air Corps troops, including the Flying Cadet Battalion, paid homage to Corporal Harry A. Teague, Headquarters Station, Randolph Field, recently when they passed in review before the veteran noncommissioned officer during the ceremony in which he was presented with the Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Clusters, also a Silver Star Medal. Major General Walter Krueger, Commanding General of the Second Division, made the presentation.

Corporal Teague spent 27 months overseas during the World War, serving with the 26th Infantry. He was awarded the Purple Heart in an announcement by the Adjutant General, in which the Secretary of War directed that a Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Clusters be presented to Corporal Teague for having been gassed in action on June 9, 1918, while serving as a Private, Headquarters Company, 26th Infantry, and later wounded in action on October 4, 1918, while serving as bugler, Company H, 26th Infantry.

Corporal Teague first enlisted in the Army at Tulsa, Oklahoma, on July 3, 1916, and served with Company G, 3rd Infantry, at Del Rio, Texas, until he sailed for France with the First Division on June 14, 1917. During the 27 months overseas service, Corporal Teague participated in five major engagements—St. Mihiel, Soissons, Meuse-Argonne, Cantigny, and Ansauville.

Colonel John B. Brooks, Commanding Officer of Randolph Field, commanded the troops during the review. Music was furnished by the 23rd Infantry, of Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

Forbidden Flight



As the first ship swerved in a steep vertical, Scotty slammed down at the D.H.

By JACK MILLAN

A mighty bad spot! That's what those American sky fighters were in. For a lot of trouble was coming their way—straight from von Strohm, the most egotistical Boche Ace at the Front. Yes, he was one wily Jerry who could certainly deliver it! But when the Yanks made him a present of a brand-new D.H., it developed that von Strohm couldn't take it. Instead, he sent it right back.

CAPTAIN Scotty MacRay, commander of the hundred and sixty-first squadron, stared in the dim light and counted aloud as the Spads of C flight romped in from their early patrol.

“One — two — three — four —” he counted. His face suddenly clouded as he listened for the fifth. The four crates tore out of the low clouds and roared down. One ship was not there—the par-

ticular one he was watching for. Mickey Flinn, now leader of C flight, was not present.

Scotty cursed. The four Spads were whipping into the wind and their motors blurred for the landing. But his eyes were strained toward the north. Second after second plunged him deeper into despair.

As Scotty waited, he cursed the whole German air force, and particularly von Strohm, the king of egotists, the ace supreme, who not only ruled that sector in the air but took even greater pleasure in demonstrating the fact—when he had enough of his buzzards along for protection. That black-and-red-checkered Fokker was an almost daily sight on the Allied side of the lines, with the rest of the circus hanging protectingly above in case they were needed.

And now Mickey had gone to feed the vanity of von Strohm. Scotty's fists clenched until the nails bit into his palms and he mouthed his hatred of von Strohm again.

"Colonel Brant wishes to see you, sir."

Scotty hardly heard the voice of the orderly behind him. Another sound had come to his ears at that instant. It was the whine of a motor and it came from the north. That might be von Strohm or one of his men, already come to announce Mickey's death.

He froze motionless while he listened more intently. Then he drew in a deep breath and his face wrinkled in a grin. It was not the throbbing drone of a Mercedes, but rather the higher-pitched scream of a Hiss. Scotty strained his eyes. He could see it now. The Spad shot into view from under the cloud bank and dived. It was Mickey!

"COLONEL BRANT—" the orderly was telling him again. Scotty turned with a chuckle that told of his relief. "Huh? What's that? Oh, sure. Heard you the first time," he answered. A quick glance at his watch and he grinned broadly. "The Old Man's up early this morning," he observed as he answered the salute of the orderly. His entire manner was changed now, with

the suspense over. "Brant must have been mighty hungry to get up at five-thirty."

The orderly grinned back at him. "He said at once, sir."

"Sure," said Scotty. "Just as soon as this little wild Irish friend of mine lands and I find out what's been keeping him."

"You're late," grinned Scotty as Mickey climbed from his cockpit and dropped to the ground. "What's been keeping you? Thought I'd have to eat breakfast alone this morning."

There was a jaunty note in Scotty's voice that gave no hint of his worry only a moment before.

"Got to tangling prop wash with a couple of von Strohm's Fokkers," Mickey grinned nonchalantly. "Guess they were trying to send me an invitation to breakfast with them, but I told 'em I already had a date."

He forgot to mention that one of the two Fokker pilots would never eat another breakfast—but that was like Mickey.

"Wait a minute till I see what the Old Man wants," Scotty told him, "and then we'll go into town and have a real feed."

He was off toward Colonel Brant's office.

"Yes, sir, you sent for me?" Scotty met the stern eyes of the old warrior as he saluted before his desk.

Colonel Brant looked up quickly. Already he was placing papers in his brief case.

"Oh, yes, Captain MacRay," he nodded. "I'm leaving for the rear. Don't know how long I'll be gone. Major Jones isn't about as yet, so I'm giving you the orders while I'm gone. The major will be in command, of course, in my absence. It's about those new Liberty D. H.'s that are ready to go. MacRay. Tell Major Jones when he arrives that under no circumstances must those ships leave the field until further orders from me. It's vitally important, captain."

"Yes, sir." Scotty's face was clouded in a frown as he saluted and turned to the door.

The one bane of Scotty's existence at the field was Major Jones. The major's

enlistment papers had asked for "Name in full," so he had truthfully written, "Nelson Wellington Van Parker Jones," on the line. The second-in-command didn't have to be in sight for his image to appear before Scotty's narrowed eyes. Here was a kiwi among kiwis to be hated more than any others.

Major Nelson Wellington Van Parker Jones was one of the misfits that the sudden plunge of the United States into the war had bred. He might have been a ribbon clerk or a lingerie salesman, before the war. When first heard of at the Front, he was a major, and second-in-command of a very important field, without the slightest knowledge of the air and less interest in learning. Advancement seemed his only ambition.

Vanity stuck out all over his important, fussy little figure. Ego flared from the beady little eyes that pried about like those of an efficiency expert through the large, heavy glasses. And conceit fairly sparked from the needlelike points of the waxed moustache which he pampered constantly.

SCOTTY AND MICKEY were on their way to the little town, a short mile from the field, when Mickey asked. "Going to order nails for breakfast? You look as though you could sure chew 'em."

Scotty growled. "It's that damned major friend of yours. The Old Man's leaving for the rear. Doesn't know how long he's going to be gone, and of course, Major Nelson Wellington Van Parker Jones, himself in person, and none other, will be in command of the field in his absence."

"Hey," snapped Mickey, "what's the idea of that friend stuff? I've been hanging around and being decent to him, but not because I like him, that's a cinch. He's slated to take command of that new field up toward Verdun, and I've got a good chance of being appointed squadron commander under him, if he doesn't get sore at me—and if that guy Ruggles doesn't horn me out for himself."

They turned in at the entrance of La Cuillère Graissée, where Madame Bourdon bustled about her establishment to

satisfy the cravings of the hungry and thirsty.

"That major's in command right now," Scotty growled as he and Mickey seated themselves at a table.

"I just saw the Old Man coming down the street right now in his car, bound for the rear."

He studied the bar table before him for a long time. "Mickey," he said at length and there was a wicked glint in his eye, "I'd give a lot to put a crimp in that swelled-headed major's style just once."

"Hey," barked Mickey, "lay off my major, will you, Scotty? He knows we're thick, and if you start anything, he'll suspect I'm in on it. Then where'll I fit for the new job?"

"Well," conceded Scotty, "the only reason I'm not starting something is because I can't think what to start. And get this, fella—I'd a damn sight rather be a buck private all my life than know that I had to thank that little squirt Jones for anything. You might get the command of the new squadron at the new field, Mickey, but if you follow that guy Jones around, you'll end up in a mess."

There was much argument over the matter in the hour and a half that followed—argument spiced with liquid refreshment from Madame Bourdon's fine cellar. And time slipped by unnoticed.

"Sufferin' mackerel!" cried Scotty suddenly as he happened to let his eyes rest for a moment on his watch. "I mighty near forgot about giving the orders to this guy Jones we've been talking about."

As the two approached the field, the angry bark of motors reached their ears, Scotty leaped ahead at a faster gait. Those motors weren't Hissos. They weren't Rolls Royce, either, or Clergets or Gnomes or Salmson's. There was a definite, sharp-bitten crack to every explosion that differentiated the sound from any motor he had yet heard.

Scotty broke into a wild dash for the field. The sound was that of Liberties preparing for flight—the Liberties in the five D. H.'s that were supposed to remain on the ground!

Suddenly the throbbing of the five mo-

tors blasted into a din of thunder. Scotty leaped ahead faster. Then he stopped short with a growl of dismay. A flight of five Liberty-powered D. H. ships—the first five with Liberties to arrive at the Front—were already in the air, droning toward the Front in a wide V!

SCOTTY leaped through the gates and on toward the main hangar, where the D. H. planes had been stored and where his Spad was also kept.

“Hey, you!” he roared to the hangar sergeant. “Who in hell ordered those D. H.’s?”

“It—it was Major Jones, sir,” stammered the startled sergeant.

“What? What’s Jones got to do with it? He can’t fly,” Scotty bellowed.

Then the corners of the sergeant’s lips curled upward in a grin. “I heard him say something about wanting to be the first to cross the lines in a Liberty D. H., sir,” he told Scotty.

“Hey, what’s that? You—you mean Major Jones is in that flight?”

The sergeant nodded.

“Get my ship out,” ordered Scotty. “Where are my helmet and goggles?” He glanced at the hook where they usually hung inside the hangar office. “Who’s flying that little swell-headed shrimp?”

The sergeant whirled to bark orders to the mechanics, then turned to answer the other questions that had come at him in one of Scotty’s long breaths.

“The major took your helmet and goggles, sir. Saw them hanging there in the office where you keep them handy.”

Scotty groaned. “And a brand-new helmet at that.”

“Ruggles is flying the D. H. that’s leading, sir,” the sergeant went on. “That’s the one the major’s in, sir.”

Mickey groaned now. “That guy Ruggles is going to push me out on my ear. I’d like to—”

“Hurry that ship,” bellowed Scotty again.

“No use,” shouted Mickey. He had been watching from the door. Scotty whirled and stared at the murky sky into which the five ships had disappeared.

“Look, Mickey,” he cried suddenly, “they’re coming back!”

“Not all of ’em,” Mickey corrected. “All but that leading plane with that halfwit Ruggles and His Highness, the major. Guess they’re going on. Can’t see anything of ’em.”

“Sure,” one of the four pilots who had returned explained later. “We don’t look crazy, do we? Can’t see your hand in front of your face when you get up over a thousand. And with these new jobs we’ve never flown before, too.”

“What the devil did you start out for, in the first place?” snapped Scotty. But he knew the answer, even before the words had left his lips.

“Had to,” came the answer. “Orders from squirt Jones himself. He wanted to be the first across the lines in a Liberty D. H., and he didn’t hesitate to tell us that he was in complete command of the field, now that Colonel Brant’s gone. We just went up behind, and when we got far enough back to make it look good, we dropped out. If he squawks, we’ll tell him we lost him in the fog.”

Scotty grinned for the first time. “Not so dumb, at that,” he recommended. Then the smile left his face as he thought of Colonel Brant. If he had ever been in a jam, he was in one right now—unless that one D. H. returned and no word reached the colonel about the hop.

THE sky settled lower and lower over the earth and each time Scotty surveyed the upper regions, there was more concern in his leathery face. An hour slipped by—and no sign of the D. H. with Major Jones. The sky began to clear.

Then a sound from the north froze him rigid. He could hear distantly the roar of a motor coming that way.

“Maybe that’s the D. H. coming back now,” ventured Mickey.

“Yeah,” drawled Scotty sourly, “and maybe it isn’t, either. I never heard a Liberty barking before this morning. But if that motor we hear is a Liberty, I’m a Dutchman.”

They listened again, tense, quiet. Scotty cursed in a low growl. He had recognized the throbbing drone as that of a Merce-

des. And what was worse, there was more than one.

The Fokkers dived out of the gray mist that was clearing slowly—five altogether, flying in a perfect, tight "V." And at point flew the most hated of all foes in that sector, von Strohm, in his red-and-black-checkered Fokker.

Down low over the tarmac they thundered. Then, when von Strohm came opposite the main hangar, a white something dashed madly back toward the tail group of his Fokker and fluttered toward the ground.

Scotty leaped from his cover, and was first to reach the note. As Mickey and others stared over his shoulder, he read,

"Thanks for the new Liberty D.H., but what in hell will we do with your major?
VON STROHM."

At that instant the five Fokkers wheeled at the end of the field, and in a long line, strung out for some distance, they roared away.

Scotty glanced at the note once more, and the rage left his face for a grin. He couldn't help it. That last phrase about the major—if he'd worked all his life to figure out a jam for the man, he couldn't have planned better.

"That damn fool Ruggles would do something like that," Mickey was chuckling mirthlessly. "But he got lost and landed right at von Strohm's field, thinking he was back of his own lines. And now the major's over there with him, and where do I fit?"

"What's going on here?" It was Colonel Brant, returned unexpectedly. "A note? Damn von Strohm! Let me see it, MacRay."

Scotty tried to control himself as he handed the note to his superior. It wouldn't be long now!

"What's the meaning of this, MacRay?" the colonel demanded angrily. "I gave you orders this morning about those Liberty D. H.'s. Did you give my message to Major Jones?"

Scotty squared his shoulders and began to speak.

There was no use hedging. And as the

words left his tight lips, the colonel's face grew apoplectic.

"Damn it, MacRay," he bellowed, "do you realize what you've done? Don't you know that the German's would have risked a whole squadron of ships to get just one of our Liberty motors? The first at the Front—and now they have one. I'll have you court-martialed for this, MacRay. I'll—I'll have you busted."

Colonel Brant was trembling with rage and he shook his fist before big Scotty MacRay's face.

"I'll give you one chance," he roared. "Just one chance. You're the cause of that Liberty motor's being in Germany. I'll give you the next five hours to get it back, blow it up, or destroy it. And if you don't—"

Scotty wanted to ask if he didn't want him to bring the Kaiser back in the rear seat. There was just about as much chance. But instead he saluted and said, "Yes, sir."

Then, as the infuriated colonel stamped away, a sudden idea came to Scotty. It might work. The sound of von Strohm's flight had not entirely died away in the distance. That had helped to remind him, to make him think of the plan.

Scotty leaped inside the hanger, hunted frantically for a pencil and paper, and wrote:

"That's a damn lie about the Liberty D.H. It arrived safely behind our own lines. You're handing out your usual line, von Strohm, but you can't kid us this time. We know you haven't got either the major or the D.H."

"There," he said as he scanned the note and handed it to Mickey. "Take a look at that, kid. If that doesn't burn up von Strohm, I'm crazy."

Mickey agreed when he had read the note. "You're crazy, all right. So what now?"

"Just a hunch," grinned Scotty. "You know there isn't a bigger swelled head on the Front than von Strohm. And don't forget, these Heinies think he's a tin god. It's a lot to expect, but if there's one guy in Germany—outside of the Kaiser and his family—who would be allowed to take the D. H. over the lines again, just

to show that they've got it, von Strohm's the guy."

"Yeah," agreed Mickey, "like so much prop wash, he is. I still think you're nuts, Scotty. But go ahead, I'm for you, anyway."

"O. K.," grinned Scotty. "I'm going over now and play postman myself for a change. I want you in the air in an hour. Meet me here over the field, and tell your flight and some of the rest of the gang to be ready to go."

LUCK was with Scotty when he reached von Strohm's field. The Fokker flight had just landed when he romped down on them. His heart leaped as he saw the Liberty D. H. sticking out of one of the almost hidden hangars, Mechanics were already at work on the motor, tearing it out.

He saw the pilots racing about under him. Von Strohm was below. Scotty aimed for him and let the note drop.

Then, as Scotty roared toward the south boundary of the enemy field, he saw von Strohm running toward the spot where he had chanced to recognize the part of the D. H. that showed. If it was possible, von Strohm would furnish proof.

Mickey was waiting for him, high above the field, as Scotty stormed back. And below he could see Spads warming on the line, ready to take the air at a moment's notice. Then they climbed to reach the high-hung clouds up in the sun, where they could watch without being seen.

Minutes slipped into a half-hour. Then a full hour passed. Hope began to fade in Scotty's heart. Maybe he should have tried to bomb the D. H. as it stood there on the ground at the German drome. But that would have been only partially satisfactory. Even if it was blown up, there might be enough left of the motor to give the Germans what they sought.

It seemed the hundredth time that he had flown to the edge of his cloud to peer down and then he stiffened. For there, far below, coming from the north, was a flight of Fokkers. He counted them. Nine altogether. And there was another plane,

flying at point. The Liberty D. H. was leading that flight of Fokkers. Von Strohm's vanity had led him into the trick. He was showing the Allies now.

Scotty waved wildly to Mickey. He nodded. He, too, had seen. A minute passed while the flight thundered its way toward the field below. Scotty gave the signal.

Down, down they hurled. And still the enemy flight below hadn't seen them yet. The sun kept them blinded in that direction.

The line of flight of the snarling Spad that Scotty rode never wavered an inch. He peered anxiously through his sights. The first burst would have to do the trick—either his or Mickey's. He was centering the twin Vickers on the cockpits of the two figures in the D. H. even before he came within range. He must get both men, for there had been dual controls in the plane. Either might fly it.

Suddenly he lifted slightly and strained above the sights. He had recognized something in that rear cockpit. The helmet that the figure there wore was strangely familiar. He knew now. It was his own helmet. Von Strohm wasn't satisfied with merely showing the ship. He was bringing the major over as an exhibit, also.

Scotty wavered slightly. his foot presstd the rudder bar and the screaming Spad swerved toward the Liberty motor. And at that same instant he saw the Fokkers spurt ahead, saw the pilot of the D. H. shoot a quick glance upward at the oncoming terror and then try to veer away.

BUT he acted an instant too late. Scotty was upon him with terrific speed. And his guns staccatoed their challenge. Tracers fluffed out before him and darted past the engine cowlings of the great Liberty. That would be a better way, at that. Much as he hated the major, he could hardly bring himself to take a chance of killing him. And this way there was a chance, a good chance, of forcing the D. H. to the field, more or less intact.

A slight movement of the controls

brought the nose of the Spad full on the engine. He grinned as he saw them tear into the the engine cowling. Laughed as he saw the puff of black smoke belch from the exhausts.

Then he had to zoom sharply to keep from colliding with the injured D. H. And as he swerved in a steep vertical, Mickey slammed down on the observation plane and finished the job.

As Scotty whirled and tore at the nearest Fokker, he saw the prop of the D. H. stop with a jerk. There was nothing for that pilot to do but land now. He had no other choice.

Wham! Wham! Ships whirled and snarled about him. Scotty saw the flight below getting into the air, saw four of the Fokkers turn to dive.

He saw men with guns on the ground, running to the spot where the D. H. was landing—saw more ships taking the air—Spads! And he roared down at the Fokkers that imperiled their take-off, and gave them all he had.

It lasted but a short minute. The Fokkers didn't care much for air fighting over an Allied field. They were cutting out and racing for home, with Spads chasing them in hot pursuit.

Scotty motioned Micky down and cut to land. He rolled close to where the D. H. had stopped, leaped out. Then he stared, wide-eyed and unbelieving. A slow grin spread across his face. For beside Major Nelson Wellington Van Parker Jones stood von Strohm! Guards had him covered and the major was sputtering.

"Take him away," barked the major importantly, as though he had done the whole thing himself. Von Strohm moved with bowed head across the field.

"I'll have those other pilots court-martialed," sputtered the major, waving his arms angrily. "Those pilots who left us after the start of the flight. I'll—" His eye singled out Mickey Flinn and Scotty MacRay from the others, and he forced a smile upon them.

"Ah, very noble work, men," he exploded. "Very noble, indeed. And, Flinn, when I receive my appointment to the

new field, I'll have you for squadron commander, if possible. And you, Captain MacRay, noble work on your part!"

Scotty did not answer. He simply stepped forward and lifted the helmet and goggles from the head of the major.

"It wasn't you, sir," he barked, "that I was concerned with. Just wanted to be sure that I got my new helmet and goggles back safe."

A crimson flush rose in the major's face. He twirled his moustache and was cut off by the colonel's voice.

"You'll do nothing to those men who left your crazy flight, major," he roared. "Thank the Lord some one around here has some sense. And when the report of this gets to headquarters, I don't expect there'll be any post waiting for you, Jones."

Then the colonel turned to Scotty. "MacRay," he said, and his voice hinted his change of feeling, "I still ought to court-martial you—" he stopped to let it sink in—"but I won't. Clever work, I'd say, captain. And in a few days I expect Major Jones' position will be open. As soon as that takes place, you'll be raised to second-in-command here at the field, MacRay.

"And Flinn," he went on, he was smiling now, "I'll need some one to take MacRay's place. It's yours, if you like."

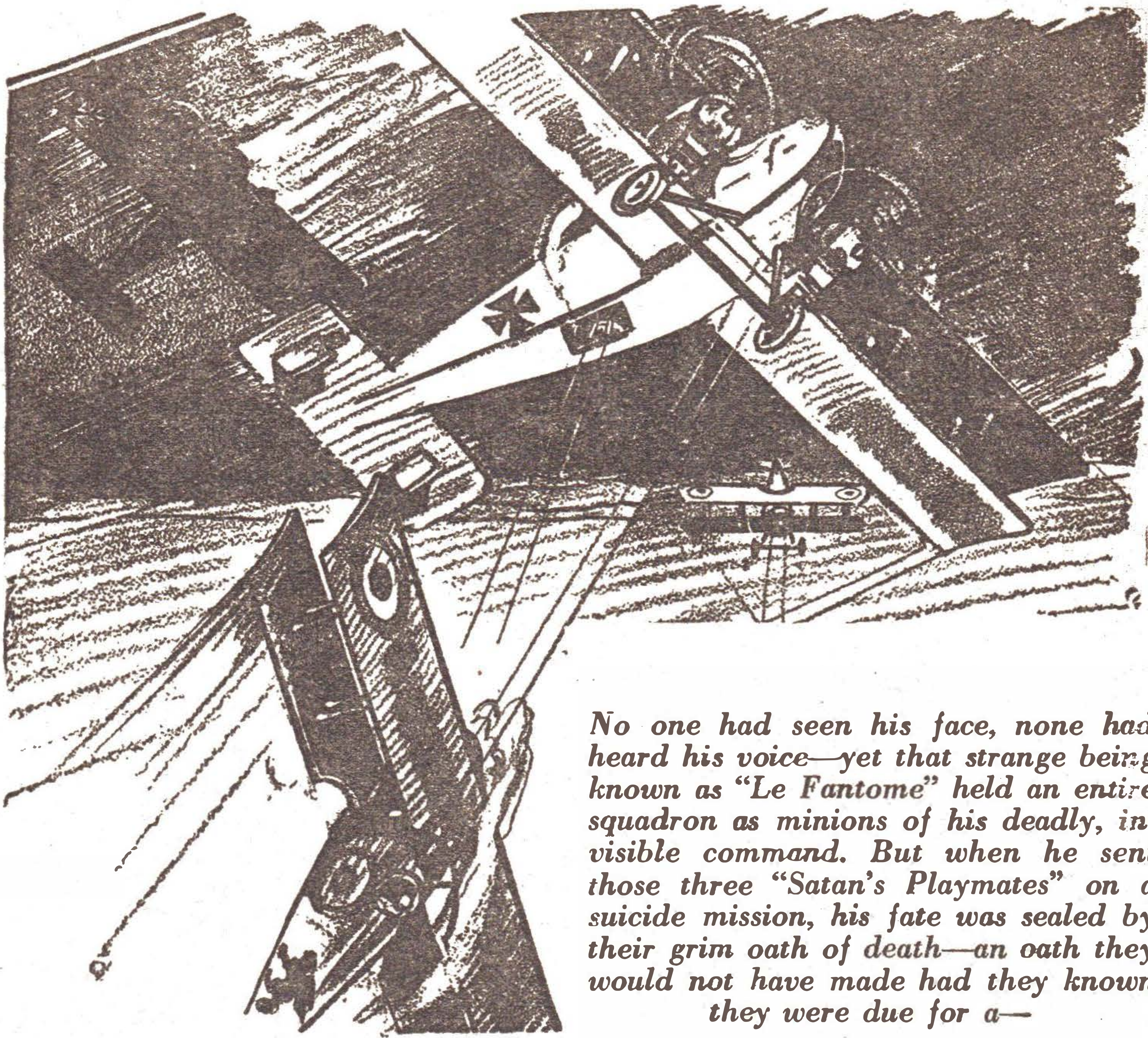
IT WAS a few minutes later, when Scotty and Mickey were alone, that Scotty was trying to write a note on the side of his Spad.

"Sort of lied in that note I sent across," he grinned, "and I figure the Heinies are entitled to a full note of truthful explanation. Take a slant at that, Mickey, and see if I covered everything?"

He handed it to his pal while he climbed into his Spad and fastened the belt, and Mickey was laughing so he could hardly read.

"Thanks for returning Liberty D. H. complete, but what in hell will we do with von Strohm?"

Wilder slashed at the Gotha, raked it with vicious bursts of Vickers lead!



No one had seen his face, none had heard his voice—yet that strange being known as “Le Fantome” held an entire squadron as minions of his deadly, invisible command. But when he sent those three “Satan’s Playmates” on a suicide mission, his fate was sealed by their grim oath of death—an oath they would not have made had they known they were due for a—

Date With the Devil

By **WILLIAM E. POINDEXTER**

Author of “Rescuers for Death,” “Observers Can Take It,” etc.

WITH the late afternoon sun glinting flashingly on silver wings, the single Spad came swish-tailing in for a smooth landing on the small, open field near a toy village of white-washed houses. The pilot climbed down and pushed up his goggles. He was young, dark as an Indian, and his face was as cold and grim as if it had been carved out of stone. But his slitted eyes were smouldering with hidden hate. For after the night’s work was done, he intended, if he lived, to kill a man!

He sat down cross-legged by the plane, fished a cigarette from his crumpled pack, and began to smoke moodily. Contrary to custom, instead of the villagers crowding about with childish curiosity to see an American birdman, no one approached him.

A few minutes later another Spad came gliding in and taxied to within a few yards of the first. The pilot, a diminutive Frenchman, had hardly stepped to the ground when a third ship joined the others. The last pilot was without h elmet

or goggles, and, with the black hair streaming about his massive face, he seemed like some savage war-god who had just stepped magically out of a long past century. He rose to a startling height, leaped to the ground and came towards the others in giant strides.

"Give me a cigarette, little men, before I take you betwixt my thumb and finger and pinch off your heads!" The Russian's voice boomed and rolled fiercely across the field, but there was a twinkle in the black eyes that belied his fierceness.

The little Frenchman sighed, his battle-scarred face grimacing like a monkey's.

"*Pardieu!*" he swore amiably. "I have known this great beast of a Boris Trago-vitch for two years, but never do I know him to have a cigarette of his own! *Sacré Dieu!* He is one—what do you call him, Wilder?"

Dick Wilder's somber eyes lightened a trifle as he glanced at the others. "'Bum' is the word," he retorted promptly. "He's a big bum. But it's your turn to feed the animal a cigarette, Pierre. Give him a match, too, before he gets violent."

The Russian accepted the cigarette and match from Pierre Lafitte, then glanced across the village, his eyes softening as they fell upon the dome and spires of a great cathedral. With the setting sun upon them, they were like red gold against the deep blue of the sky.

"It is beautiful," he boomed, a sort of awed wonder in his voice, which was oddly in contrast with the sheer animal vitality that seemed to dominate him. "And that is what the Germans would destroy tonight?"

Wilder had drawn a pack of greasy cards from his pocket, and was dealing poker hands to pass the time. He glanced up and nodded indifferently. The cathedral was now being used as a hospital.

"It's the hundreds of wounded men and nurses in there that I'm worried about, not the cathedral," he said. "Ante up, Boris. This may be the last poker game we will have together this side of hell!"

The Russian glanced at his cards, threw them down disgustedly, and then

sprang to his feet. "Bah, it is a game that never could I understand," he roared contemptuously. "I understand the game of love, where the stake is a maiden's heart. Ho, and I understand the game that we play up there," he waved his hand at the inverted bowl of the sky, "where the stakes are life and death. But a game for money—it is not for men. Give me another cigarette."

WILDER SWORE but produced the required cigarette. He glanced across the field and noted that a man was approaching them from a small white house that bordered the edge of the field. He turned to the others.

"Listen, fellows," he said swiftly, "we've been sent here, as you know, to guard the hospital because we've had word that the Jerries are planning an air raid tonight. It's quite likely that some of us will wash out. But I want you to swear by the memory of our comrades who have died that the survivors will seek out the man who calls himself '*Le Fantome*'—the Ghost—and kill him at any cost!"

With upraised hands and faces suddenly deadly and grim, they swore. When they turned about, the man who had been approaching across the field was near them and they saw that he had been horribly mutilated. He limped badly; one arm was shriveled to the elbow, and a black patch covered the place where an eyeball had been torn from its socket. He was dressed in the faded smock of a French peasant, but there was something in his bearing that suggested he had been a soldier. And in spite of his broken body, his head was held arrogantly high, his one eye twinkled as if he still found life good.

He brought his hand to a half-salute as he paused before the three pilots.

"I have been informed that an air raid is impending," said the newcomer in good but heavily accented English, "and that you three have been detailed to guard the hospital. I am to light a fire on this field to enable you to land again in the darkness. In the meantime, I bring you coffee, *camarades*. It is little service I can ren-

der, but—*eh bien!*” He gestured apologetically to indicate his injuries.

The Russian seized the bucket of coffee gratefully, raised it to his lips. Wilder rose to his feet and nodded his thanks. “You look as if you’d seen plenty of service, friend,” he said, with a respectful glance at the other’s scars. Then he turned in alarm. “For cripes’s sake, Frenchy, get that coffee away from Boris. He’s trying to take a bath in it.”

“I hope I shall be able to offer all of you further hospitality after the attack,” the stranger said.

Wilder’s face darkened with remembrance. “Decent of you,” he grunted, “but I’m afraid we’ll be busy. By the way, do you know of a man hereabouts whom they call *Le Fantome*? Know where he lives?”

The other hesitated a moment. “A great cowardly brute of a man who skulks in safety while others risk their lives for France?” he asked. The American nodded eagerly. “I know of him. Why do you ask?”

FOR an instant Wilder was silent, staring at the other man, measuring him.

“I believe I’ll tell you,” he decided deliberately at last. “You have been a soldier. You know what it means to be crippled and disfigured for life, so you will understand. Perhaps you have seen men sent out on hopeless missions, to die.”

The Frenchman nodded, his own twinkling eye fixed steadily on the other man in the fading light.

“All right,” Wilder said grimly. “The three of us have been together for a long time and we’ve become known as Satan’s Playmates—because we’ve raised so much hell, I suppose. Well, we don’t mind taking suicide orders from a man who is willing to lead and risk his own life. We don’t mind taking orders in the line of duty from H.Q. But the skipper of our escadrille is just a figurehead. He is forced to take commands from a man no one has ever seen—a man who stays safely behind the lines while he sends better men than he is out to die.

“He doesn’t even ask for volunteers. We’ve seen friends and comrades sent to

miserable deaths that could have been avoided, by a man who is a coward and a murderer. Well, he’s given his last suicide command. You have been a soldier. Doesn’t such a man deserve to die?”

He stopped, panting a little, his eyes murderous as he thought of the men he had seen die on mad excursions across the lines. Pierre Lefitte was sucking calmly at a cigarette, apparently unmoved, but a nerve was twitching violently in his scarred cheek. The Russian’s great hands were opening and closing as if he felt a throat between his fingers.

“Such a man deserves to die,” the cripple agreed gravely.

Wilder nodded. “And if we live through the night, we, Satan’s Playmates, are going to see that he *does* die,” he said tensely. “We’ll live up to our names. I suppose they’ll call it murder and stand us in front of a stone wall. All right, let ’em. Yet it’s nothing but justice. If you’d just tell us where to find him, we’ll take care of the matter and see that you don’t get into any trouble over it, you know.”

The other nodded thoughtfully. “Such a man as you describe deserves to die,” he repeated. “Me, I will show him to you after the attack. I wish you good hunting tonight, *camarades*, and I wish that I could be with you.”

When the Frenchman had gone, it was already dark, and the three pilots crouched down by their ships to listen and wait. Sometimes the Gothas attacked at an early hour, and they were ready to spring into instant action.

Dick Wilder shivered a little as the night air grew colder and the wind began to rise. He was numb with misery as he thought of what was to happen. The three friends had been inseparable—their reckless daring in the air, and their insane escapades on the ground earning them the name of Old Satan’s Playmates—and tonight he felt that at least one of them was to die. But perhaps the one who lost his life would be the lucky one.

Whoever the mysterious “Ghost” was, he must be of high military rank, and the least they could expect for killing him

would be a firing squad. But this man issued death commands. He did not ask for volunteers. He commanded, and men shrugged their shoulders and went out to die. But that would not happen again.

CLOSE beside him, he heard the big Russian chuckle. "Soon we shall be playing the game, my little friends," he said eagerly, his voice toned down till it was the rumble of distant thunder. "I think that tonight I shall lose. But it is the game that counts, and not who wins or loses. I will play the game gloriously, for what man can say which is the most to be desired—the sweet red wine of life, or the sour white wine of death."

Dick Wilder felt his heart sink with dread. He had heard of men whose premonitions of death had been fulfilled. But on the other side of him, Pierre chuckled softly.

"Our Boris grows—how do you say it?—melodramatic, eh?" he jeered. "He gets pleasure in dramatizing even his own death, when everyone knows that there is not a bullet that can puncture his tough hide."

The Russian's genial laugh boomed out. "This little monkey of a man, whom I could put into my pocket, dares to deride me," he thundered. "Shall I pinch off his head, or—but no! I will take his last cigarette away from him and—"

"Listen!" The little Frenchman was leaning forward in a strained attitude. There seemed to be no sound anywhere except for the faint sighing of the wind in a distant grove of trees. There was no movement, no lights in the village. They seemed alone in a dead world. But presently they were aware of a high, distant vibration, and they leaped to their feet.

"Son of a speckled pig!" the Frenchman rasped, "there is more than one of them—the Gothas. We have our work cut out for us tonight. *Voilà!* And remember our oath, *camarades!*"

They sprang to the ships, drawing the props through compression until finally, one by one, the motors stuttered into thundering life. The Frenchman was the first away, his ship disappearing in-

stantly in the dense darkness. The mild little man became a demon in action; he was eager for the conflict.

As the Russian's plane got under way, Wilder could hear Boris shouting out some wild, joyous battle song, his voice rising vibrantly above the thunder of the motors. The giant was going out to meet death with the same lusty zest that he had given to his turbulent life.

With face set and emotionless now, Wilder read his instrument board in the faint glow of the light of the dash, and eased his ship gently from the ground. It was blind flying, but after he had circled twice he had the faint edge of the horizon to guide him. With hand constantly at the throttle, he climbed the little ship as fast as possible. The Gothas would probably come down a few thousand feet in order to make sure of their objective before releasing their bombs, but he wanted as much altitude as he could get.

At nine thousand feet he leveled out and circled, straining his eyes into the engulfing darkness, striving to catch a glimpse of the exhaust flames of the marauding Gothas. An instant later two searchlights near the hospital shot wavering, ghostly white fingers into the darkness, sweeping restlessly back and forth, never still, never pausing in their relentless quest. Dick swung his Spad in a slight bank and edged over in the direction of the hospital, still climbing. He wanted to keep out of the glare of the lights, and thus take the enemy bombers by surprise.

At twelve thousand he again leveled out and peered about him. An instant later a searchlight paused and steadied, and there was a great Gotha bearing steadily on to her objective. The other searchlight centered on her for an instant, then jerked away to sweep the sky for the second bomber.

BATTING the throttle wide open, Wilder gunned in the direction of the enemy ship which had made no attempt to evade the light. She was drawing dangerously close to the hospital now. From somewhere below, red flashes split

the darkness as the anti-aircraft battery went into furious but futile action.

Before Wilder could reach the Gotha, he saw a Spad flash into the light, red points of flame darting murderously from her nose. The Gotha's rear gunner answered the challenge, but the Spad had struck and was already swallowed up in the darkness.

A split second later another ship rolled into the glare just behind and above the Gotha's tail. Despite the Spandau bullets that smashed back, it clung there tenaciously, and Dick knew that the reckless one was Boris Tragovitch. The Gotha plunged and went into a sideslip, striving to escape the light, but it followed and kept her outline against the sky.

Wilder was already slashing in from the side when he saw flames shoot out from the German's front cockpit, and knew that she had been hard hit. But almost at the same instant, he saw the Spad fling upward in an uncontrolled half-loop, fall off on one wing, and go spinning wildly away into the blackness.

A savage curse tore from Wilder's throat. "Got him, sure as hell!" he muttered. "He'll never pull out of a spin like that, even if he's still alive." His teeth clamped down on his lip.

With motor thundering and both Vickers hammering, he plunged down on the tail of the Gotha, raking her with vicious bursts from nose to tail-assembly. But that was unnecessary. If Boris had died, he had at least given full account of himself first. The Gotha was in a thundering power dive as the pilot fought desperately to put out the flames. But they sprang up, engulfing the ship, and a moment later she shivered into blazing fragments as the gas tanks exploded.

Wilder pulled back on the stick and lofted his plane, searching for the second Gotha. And then, as something flashed past him, he knew that he had almost rammed her. He swung his ship in a vicious bank in an endeavor to pick her up again, but at the same moment the searchlight flashed across his ship, swept back and centered on him. He was blinded by the white glare and flung the

Spad over on a wing to escape it. But it followed him, the operator evidently believing that he was a German.

He swore luridly as bullets raked along the cowling and tore the windshield into shreds, narrowly missing the top of his head. He rolled his ship in a desperate maneuver, but still the bullets followed him, pounding closer and closer to his shrinking body. He shrieked curses at the light that revealed him to the enemy ship and left her in the safety of the blackness.

The Spandau bullets stopped abruptly as another Spad cut in between him and the Gotha, her Vickers blazing, and he knew that it was Lafitte. Then both ships were gone, and the searchlight left him to sweep frantically across the sky and back again. He cut his motor to listen. Below him he could hear the high drone of one Mercedes motor, but the other one was missing and he believed the Gotha had been hard hit and was going down for a forced landing. Far to the left he could hear the Frenchman's Spad.

WILDER cut in his motor again and went down in a spiral. Below him he could see a faint red glow, and knew that the crippled Frenchman had lighted a fire on the landing field, as he had promised. If the German was going to try for a forced landing, she would be certain to head for that lighted field as the only possible point at which she could get down safely.

Dick Wilder took a chance and dived for the ground. If he was mistaken in believing that the Gotha had been hit, then she would probably get the hospital. On the other hand, if she landed, as he believed she would, he might prevent her from taking off again.

As he swept low over the field, he could see nothing except in the corner where the fire was, but he set his trucks down heavily and cut the ignition. Almost instantly the other Spad roared in and Lafitte leaped to the ground. For an instant they stood listening, but could hear no sound of a motor anywhere.

"She landed, sure as hell," Dick muttered. "But where—"

He broke off as a shout reached his ears. "This way, *camarades!* Follow me!"

At first he thought it was Boris, and his heart chugged into his throat. But a figure rushed past with clumsy, grotesque leaps and lunges, and he recognized it as the crippled Frenchman. The two pilots sprang in pursuit, but had not taken two steps when a motor shattered the silence from the other side of the field. Another instant and the Gotha's second motor caught. They were running desperately now, but the crippled man was still ahead of them. A vague shape seemed to loom directly over them, and with a yell of despair, Wilder flung himself to one side just in time to escape the wing of the bomber as her tail came up in the slipstream.

There was no way of stopping her now. Within a few seconds she could be over the hospital, release her bombs, and be lost in the darkness again before they could even start the motors of their planes. Hundreds of helpless men would die because Satan's Playmates had failed!

But in that moment of black despair, a light shot skyward Dick looked up just in time to see the cripple drop a Very pistol, and with his one good hand snatch a hand grenade from his pocket and bite out the pin. In the weird glare of the Very light, his fury-contorted face did not look human. He hurled the grenade and followed it in that desperate, lurching stride that ate up the distance miraculously.

The bomb fell true, and burst almost beneath the tail of the Gotha. The big plane was just leaving the ground, but her trucks smashed back to earth again, and she lurched and careened crazily as the pilot fought the controls. But the motors were still thundering, and she did not seem to be seriously damaged.

Dick and Pierre were on their feet again and running towards the ship, which was swinging around for another attempted take-off. The rear gunner swung his Maxim, and the crippled Frenchman seemed to be running straight into that devastating stream of

death that erupted from the muzzle. Once he staggered as if he had been hit, but the next moment he was under the depression angle of the gun. He leaped up, something bright and glinting in his hand.

The two remaining Satan's Playmates reached the Gotha and leaped for the cockpits. As Wilder flung himself upon the pilot, the ship veered, heeled over, and straightened out again as the German was forced to close the throttle. He whirled upon Wilder, crashing both fists upward and causing the American's head to snap back as if his neck were broken. With his senses reeling, he sank iron fingers into the man's throat and clung grimly.

THE Gotha came to a shuddering halt close by the fitful blaze of the fire in the corner of the field, and by its light Dick could see Pierre sprawl across the wing and fall to the ground, his face smashed by a wrench in the hands of one of the Germans. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the man raise the wrench again, and he jerked desperately to one side. The heavy piece of metal missed him and struck the German pilot a glancing blow which only the heavy leather helmet kept from knocking his brains out.

An ironic chuckle broke from Wilder's lips, but the wrench was raised for another impact. He knew he could not escape it this time. In the split second before it landed, he saw the crippled Frenchman fighting furiously, his knife, dripping with blood, flicking like the head of a striking snake. But his opponent had a Luger against the Frenchman's head, finger tightening on the trigger.

Wilder's fist lashed out—and caught the German full in the mouth, causing him to drop the pistol. Then the earth reeled as if with a titanic shock. For a single bitter instant, Wilder knew again the utter despair of failure, and then he ceased to know anything.

A few minutes later he became conscious of an insistent whisper in his ear. With pain thundering and throbbing

through his head, he opened his eyes and looked about. The Gotha still stood near the fire, and he could see the Germans bending over the body of the pilot, working frantically to bring him back to consciousness.

There was no sound from the little village. It was empty of all save the old, the women and children, and it seemed to be crouching there in the darkness as if fearful of the terrible thing that was soon to happen.

As Wilder saw the pilot stir, a swift hope ran through his veins. He tried to spring up, then sank back with a groan as he realized that his hands were tied behind him.

Again he became aware of that persistent whispering in his ear, and, turning his head, he saw that the crippled Frenchman was lying beside him, with Pierre just beyond. On the ground close by the Frenchman's face lay the knife.

"*Sacré Dieu!* Turn your back to me before it is too late. Would you give up the fight without a struggle?" As he spoke, the man seized the handle of the knife between his teeth.

Wilder grinned with battered lips, but turned his back obediently. "Without a struggle, eh? What does this bird think we've been doing—saying our prayers?" he thought, then set his teeth as the sharp knife, wielded clumsily, slashed his wrists. But what could he do even if he had his hands free, he wondered dismally. He couldn't reach the Gotha because the Germans were between him and it. There wasn't a chance, for already the German pilot was being helped to his feet.

But the indomitable spirit of the crippled man at his side—a man who would never stop fighting until the life was torn from his shattered body—was filling the American with a warm glow. Hell! They might be licked, but those Jerries would have to prove it!

Wilder felt as if his wrists were being slashed to shreds. But a moment later when he strained his hands apart, the cords parted with a soft snap. Slowly, he gathered his legs beneath him, but at

the moment he had no plan in mind. They would get him—perhaps they would go on to destroy the hospital. But before they did that, they'd know they'd been in a fight!

DICK WILDER came to his feet and drove forward in a swift, deadly rush—the more deadly because he was certain that it meant his finish. His shoulder struck the huddled group of men with all his weight behind them. One of them went down.

That rush had carried the American almost into the fire, and as he slid to a halt and turned, a Luger roared almost in his face, the powder stinging his skin. Blinded, he bent swiftly, caught up a flaming stick and dashed it viciously into the man's face.

As the German fell back with a scream of pain, inspiration came to Wilder. Regardless of the searing pain in his hands and slashed wrists, he caught up flaming embers, leaped forward, and hurled them at the Gotha. They scattered over the wings, fell into the cockpits. Holes began to appear in the fabric, and an overheated ammo drum sprayed the air with bullets in all directions.

A fist collided with Wilder's jaw, and he sprawled to the ground, watching tensely. There was nothing more he could do. The Germans were battling desperately with the flames. Suddenly both motors, which had been ticking slowly over, burst into a strident roar and the big plane shuddered forward. They were going to try for a take-off in the hope that the slipstream might put out the flames.

It was a gallant attempt, a last-ditch fight, but it was doomed to failure. At the far side of the field, a solid sheet of flame swept back. Gas tanks and bombs let go with a thunderous concussion, and where had been Gotha and men, there was nothing but bits of blazing wreckage scattered over a wide area.

Slowly, wearily, Dick dragged himself to his feet and staggered across to the other two. He found the knife, cut their bonds, and helped them up, staring at them with haunted eyes.

DRIPPING with blood, with the patch torn from his eye so that the empty socket glared horribly, the cripple stared at the others for an instant, then tossed his head back with a wild laugh.

"It is amusing—this!" he chuckled. "A few minutes ago a Boche had his gun to my head. Another instant and I would die. Another moment and I would issue no more death commands. But you saved my life. Eh! You set out to slay *Le Fantome*, and instead you save his life. *C'est drôle!*"

Pierre sucked in his breath hissing, while Wilder grew tense.

"You mean," he almost whispered, "that you—you are the Ghost—"

"That is what I mean, *mes amis*," returned the other composedly. "The one who skulks behind the lines while other men risk their lives, as you so justly said. It does not matter who I am, but in my time I fought for France till I could fight no longer. Now I must fight with my brains, and use other men as my weapons."

He paused a moment and sucked in his breath in a sobbing, pain-racked gasp. "Aye, you may kill me," he went on. "It is easy to die. The hard thing is to live with a shattered body like mine. It is true that I send other men out to die and count their lives as nothing if it means a chance to help *la belle France*. It is true that I drive other men as I once drove myself. Kill me, my friends, for

if you do not, so long as I live will I send men to die in the name of France. If you do not, the time will come when I shall send you to die, also, even as the great Russian died tonight!"

With his eye blazing with fanatic patriotism, his body shaking but his spirit undaunted, he looked at Playmates, and waited. They turned to look at each other.

"*Le diable!*" Pierre spat suddenly. "I did not know. I break my oath, and gladly. It would be a pleasure to die at the command of such a man as this."

Dick Wilder nodded slowly, and brought his hand up to a salute. "We've been fools, sir, just as we've always been and always will be, I suppose," he said. "The oath is broken. If Boris Tragovitch were here, he would say the same—" He broke off, choking a little, then started convulsively as a great figure rose out of the darkness, staggering toward them.

"And Boris Tragovitch *does* say so," boomed a voice. "God of gods! I have heard enough of the story to know that *this* man is one after my own heart!"

"*Sacré Dieu!*" chuckled Pierre. "But did I not say there was not a bullet that could puncture the hide of this great animal?"

The three Satan's Playmates, reunited again, grinned happily at each other.

"Bah!" thundered the Russian, "give me a cigarette, little men, before I twist your necks betwixt my thumb and finger!"



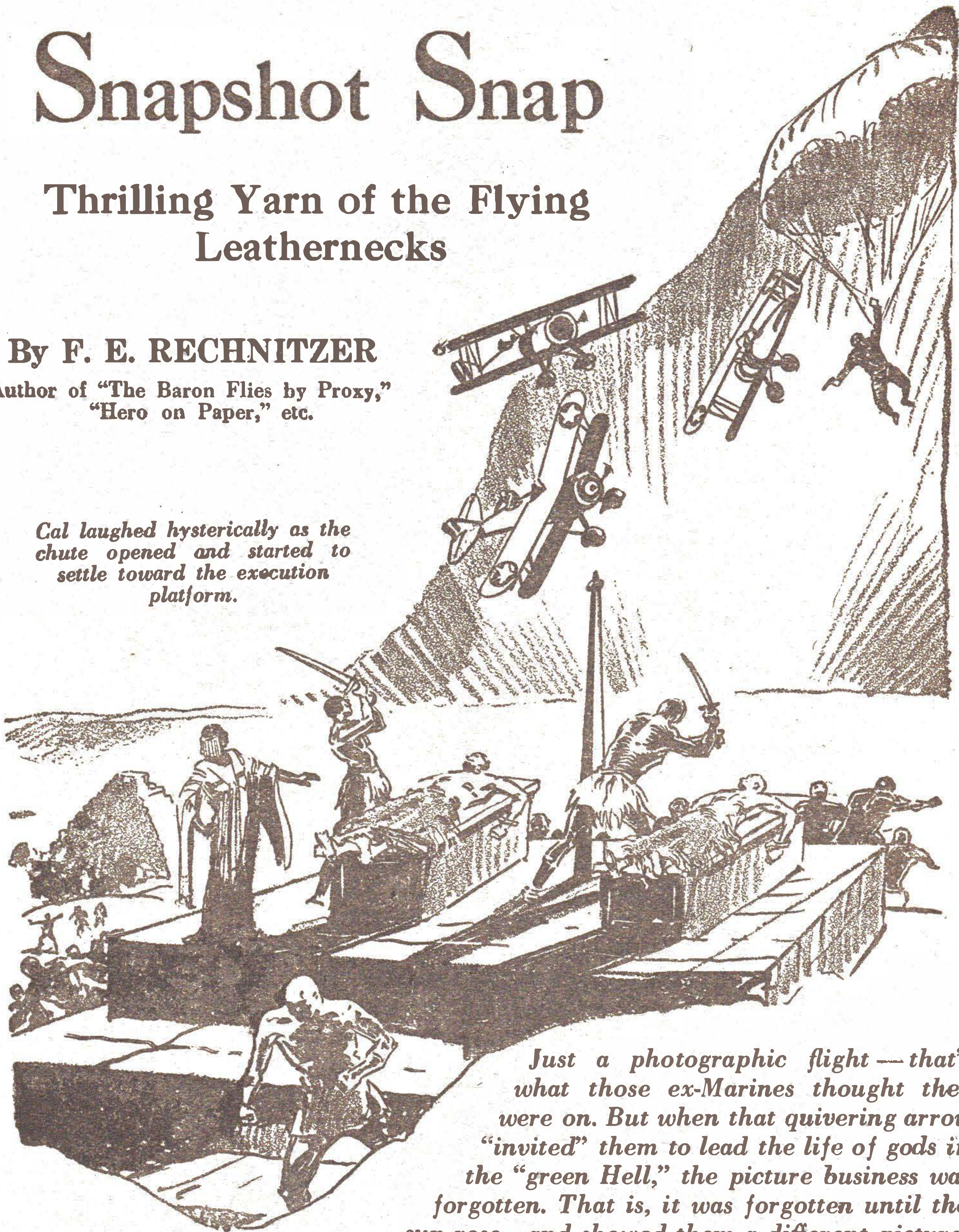
Snapshot Snap

Thrilling Yarn of the Flying Leathernecks

By F. E. RECHNITZER

Author of "The Baron Flies by Proxy,"
"Hero on Paper," etc.

Cal laughed hysterically as the chute opened and started to settle toward the execution platform.



Just a photographic flight — that's what those ex-Marines thought they were on. But when that quivering arrow "invited" them to lead the life of gods in the "green Hell," the picture business was forgotten. That is, it was forgotten until the sun rose—and showed them a different picture!

IF it had not been for the oil and muck on the dull saffron wings of the amphibian, they might have glistened in the setting sun as it circled over the mud flats which pass as shore down there by Portoex. Even the D. C. stuff on the bottom wing was just a smear of grime to the observers on the rotting wharf. From where they sat they could hear the breather gurgling like a half-plugged

drain as the prop slowed up and the nose of the ship came around into the wind. If they had been closer, they might have noticed the puckered fabric rippling in the slipstream while the bus dropped closer to the shadow-darkened water. If their eyes had been sharp, they might have seen a center-section strut quite neatly spliced with a bit of driftwood and a frayed length of flying wire. And

if they had been that close, they would have seen a set of beautiful golden whiskers pluming back again the pilot's left shoulder as he leaned over the side.

The pontoons smacked the water. Spray flew, reflected gold for a moment, and then settled back with tiny splashes, adding their bit to the ruffling of the mirrored bay. The amphibian lost speed and settled down to a slow bobbing as the door of the cabin creaked open and a flaming redhead appeared with a coil of greasy rope and a salt-corroded anchor in his hairy fists.

"Sure this is the place?" the redhead called through the window as he made his way to the forward end of the pontoon. "Not going to have me burying myself in the sand tonight to get away from mosquitoes and then gettin' eaten alive by ticks, are you?"

The pilot's head came out of the window. It was the head with the golden stuff framing a suntanned face. "Will you shut up, Brick, an' get that anchor into the mud?"

"Okay," grinned the man called Brick.

THE anchor splashed into the water, and the rope slid through Brick's fingers and stopped. Brick ran it through the ring and tied the knot, kicking it to see that it held. In a few seconds he was sitting in the open door, swinging his feet above the water.

"Going to take the camera ashore tonight?" he leaned back and asked.

"Nope, leaving it here," was the quiet reply from the interior of the craft. "Not takin' any chances. This job means dough to us."

"What do you mean, not takin' any chances?" Brick looked puzzled. "Aren't you afraid somebody'll snitch it?"

"Nope. We're sleepin' out here in the bus tonight," came the even voice from inside. "You didn't notice those two ships on the other side of the point, did you?"

"What ships?" asked Brick. "I didn't see any ships, Cal."

"See, that's why I have to lose about an hour every time we go out to grab a picture." The man called Cal was standing in the low door. He was the one with

the golden beard. "Always have to circle the place a dozen times before you see what you're supposed to shoot. If I wasn't afraid of getting lost altogether, I'd let you handle the wheel an' I'd do the shooting."

"That'd be swell!" Brick moved out on the pontoon and rubbed his cheek. "You know, I'd like to catch you asleep sometime and clip those whiskers off you."

Cal grinned and took the seat vacated by Brick, then called for a native to take them ashore in his dugout. While the brown-skinned lad paddled toward them, Cal pointed to shore. "See them?"

"Who?" said Brick.

"Navy boys, sittin' over there on the dock. Two of those birds look like Marines—"

"Maybe they're some of our old outfit," said Brick.

"Maybe," smiled Cal. "I saw a couple of busses out there on the catapults. Corsairs."

"No kiddin'?"

"Yes, kiddin'. That's just what I'm afraid of," scowled Cal.

"Well, why don't you shave?" snapped Brick.

"It isn't that. It's this bus," replied Cal. "They're going to razz the life out of us about this second-hand crate of ours. You remember when we left the service how we were braggin' about what we'd do in commercial aviation? Here we are, just a couple of tramp air photographers, hardly able to make enough to keep a ship in repair."

"Or shave," muttered Brick. "Come on, we'll know in a minute. Here's the canoe."

The two men piled into the dugout and headed for shore.

WELL, if it isn't old Brick Kemp- is," came a hail from the dock. "Did you just come in in that lopsided crate out there?" A husky man in the uniform of a U. S. Marine swung an arm toward the amphibian.

"Hello, Lieutenant Nathan," grinned Brick as he swung himself up on the wharf. "Hello, Lieutenant Cruthers," he said, turning to another uniformed man.

"Who you got with you?" smiled the officer. "Haven't I seen that dome before? Well, I'll be blessed if it isn't Cal Stevens in disguise. What's the big idea, Cal—creditors gettin' tough?"

"How are you, Nathan?" grinned Cal.

"What's the idea of the chin guard?" asked Lieutenant Cruthers.

"Just an oath I took," said Cal.

"Would anybody take an oath to fly that erate you just landed?"

"Say, she flies swell, Mr. Nathan," interrupted Brick. "Hasn't let us down—yet."

"Yet is right! What are you doing down here in this neck of the woods, and why the trick make-up? Gonna do a movie?"

"Snapping snaps," said Cal. "That's our racket now. Me and Brick are in the aerial photography game. Gonna take a couple shots of some old temple about twenty-five miles inland tomorrow."

"The hell you are!" laughed Nathan. "In that crate?"

Cal nodded. "In that crate. She'll hold up until I get a new one. And what are you doing down here with a couple of battleships?"

"Been looking for Tordino down here for a month. There's a detachment coming out of the brush tomorrow night. Then we get out of here."

"Who's Tordino?" asked Cal.

"Some bird that's been stirring up the natives down here. Calls himself a high priest. Had them going well for a while, according to reports," explained Nathan.

"An' the Marines are down here to protect American interests, I suppose?"

"That's right. Funny part of it is, though, that not a Marine has seen hide or hair of him. We've been doing two patrols a day, too. You say you're flying inland to take pictures?"

"Yep. Got a contract to take some shots of a temple in there. Got to get some obliques, too, to get the sky line. The professor that's gonna lead an expedition here next month to dig around some of these old ruins has an idea that humps on the sky line will indicate ruins."

"You better postpone it for a while,

Cal," advised Cruthers. "You'll have to fly low to get obliques, and I wouldn't even fly high over that jungle stuff with that bus of yours. Can't you put it off?"

"Nope. Going tomorrow morning," retorted Cal. "The dough I get for this job, added to what I've already got, will put me within one thousand dollars of the ship I want to buy. Then I can make some real money—"

"An' shave," broke in Brick.

Nathan looked up at Brick and laughed. "What's the idea of Cal's hiding behind that stuff, Brick?"

"Swore he wouldn't shave until he had a new bus." Brick edged closer. "Say, lieutenant, you aren't kiddin' about Tordino bein' in these parts, are you? I read something in the paper about him while we was in Mexico. Doesn't like whites much, does he?"

"He's down here, all right," said Nathan soberly. "Layin' low right now while the Marines are here, but just as soon as we leave, he'll bust right out again with his killing."

"Killing?" asked Brick with new interest.

"Human sacrifice, they call it." Nathan paused. "I suppose if you flop in there with that piece of flyin' junk of yours, you'll be yelping for the whole Navy and Marine Corps to yank you out?"

Brick's freckled face broke into a grin. "You're forgettin' that we were in the Marines once, lieutenant."

"What do you mean?" Cruthers grinned.

"You birds are never where you're needed," Brick said with a chuckle. "If we got in trouble, we'd have to get out the best we could or else call for the Northwest Mounties. They'd get here faster. You guys are always arguin' about who's gonna get a tin medal."

Cal spread a map out on the planking. Pointing a finger to a blue pencil mark, he said: "That's where we're heading for, fellows. Right there is supposed to be a temple, and five miles to the left is a pyramid. The professor talked me deaf and dumb about the relics of the old Mayas he expected to find around those two spots."

"Won't he be surprised if he finds the remains of what years ago was a good airplane?" Caruthers asked, and then ducked.

Nathan bent over and examined the map. Finally he looked up. "You know, Cal, you're heading right in over where this Tordino is supposed to be hiding."

"Well, what of it?" snapped Cal as he folded the map. "It's our funeral."

A tender slid up to the dock, and the two Marine pilots got to their feet. "Well, we got to get back to the boat now," said Nathan. "If you need us, let Brick know. He'll come running for help if he gets in a jam."

"Not to the Marines, I won't," grinned Brick, as the two men went down to the tender. The boat started to move. "An' say," called Brick, "we'll bring you back a picture of this bird Tordino an' let you guys see what he looks like."

THE loom of dawn was weaving a shroud of gray mist over the jungle when Stevens and his mechanic started tinkering with the motor. At last the prop began to claw at the morning breeze. Brick yanked up the anchor, and in a few minutes the lumbering old amphibian had dropped the bay from around its pontoons and was heading northwest over the jungle.

Just back of Stevens, Brick sat hunched over the hole in the bottom of the fuselage, watching the forest unroll under the ship. In front of him stood the old-type camera that lack of funds made it necessary for them to use.

An hour and fifteen minutes later the amphibian was circling low over the dense jungle. With wings tilted and nose holding the horizon, Cal nursed his ship around while Brick slid the plate carrier back and forth and pressed the controls. They were getting some good shots of little knobs that poked their heads up over the horizon. As each plate was exposed, Brick slapped the pilot on the back and Cal wrote down the number, compass course, pin point, and the time.

Plate after plate slid through the camera. Then a sudden sputtering of the motor interrupted them, and Brick for-

got all about pictures as Cal began to work at the throttle controls. A gurgling pop sounded from the old radial, and she quit cold. Brick leaned out to see what was underneath.

Rank vegetation stretched for miles around. He slipped carefully to the other side of the ship and stuck his head through the sliding window. Something whizzed past his face. He blinked in surprise. His face paled as he studied the object quivering in the spar of the upper wing. There, dragging slowly back in the wind, was a long-shafted arrow. He shouted to Cal and pointed. Cal nodded and pointed toward the side of the motor cowling where the mate to the arrow in the wing had pierced the fabric.

"Indians!" Brick shouted, and then looked down at the hole in the floor. He kicked a cushion over the opening and then moved up closer to Stevens.

"Got the gas line while we were flying low," Cal said over his shoulder while he juggled the wheel. "Should have known better."

Glass tinkled to the floor back in the cabin. Brick saw an arrow quivering in the wooden side of the camera. A floor board threw off a sliver and Brick felt relieved to see that only about half an inch of the arrowhead penetrated the wood.

The ship sank lower and lower, and Cal, much to Brick's disgust, kept banking around in an S-turn, which kept the fabric sides of the ship facing the forest from which the arrows whistled. But Cal knew what he was doing. His keen eyes had spotted a tiny pond down in a clearing, and that was the only place for miles where there was a possible chance of setting down without breaking their necks.

A towering tree grabbed at a wing tip and missed as Cal straightened out. The pool lay, green and clear, ahead of them. Spray covered the windows as they smacked in. They cleared just as the sound of tearing metal and splintering wood reached their ears. The ship careened over on one side and came to a staggering halt, about a hundred feet from the shore.

“WELL, here we are.” Cal forced a smile as he looked back at Brick, who seemed dejected.

“Yeah, here we are, an’ we’re the only ones that know where.” Brick glanced toward the green brush along the shore. “Except for those fool Indians that have been popping at us. Wish I hadn’t shot off my mouth about the Marines. I’d give a million bucks to see a flock of them come along now. An’ a couple of battle-ships, too,” he added.

“Well, let’s try an’ find a way of getting ashore,” said Cal.

“Don’t have to look far,” Brick pointed. “There come half a dozen dugout now.”

Within a few seconds the plane was surrounded by a group of sullen natives, who seemed to be paying particular attention to Cal.

“Kinda interested in your whiskers,” said Brick. “Maybe they’ll be the savin’ of us yet.”

The dugouts drew closer. The natives pointed at Cal and jabbered across the water to each other.

“Boy, are you popular around here!” growled Brick as he tried to squint skyward. “Come on, Marines,” he muttered.

“Yeah, come on, Marines,” growled Cal as he watched a large gayly decorated canoe slip away from the shore. “Lot of good that’ll do. How would they get to us? Look, Brick, see that skinny bird in the bow of that dugout?”

Brick examined the newcomer a moment and then turned a sober face to Cal. “Looks like some high mogul. All dolled up for a wedding.”

“Or a funeral,” murmured Cal, watching the painted dugout swing around the wing which rested in the water.

“Meaning?” Brick studied his friend’s face for a moment, and what he saw there was his answer. He turned to see the figure in the dugout hold up a thin brown hand as it approached the door of the cabin. A pair of burning black eyes stared into his through the shattered window. A shiver ran up his spine as he watched Cal slide over to the door and push it open.

“You have come?” came a clear, even voice from outside.

Brick looked out over Cal’s shoulder. “Looks like they were expectin’ us,” he whispered.

Cal dropped to a sitting position on the floor and then leaned toward the tall man in the dugout. “You have been expecting us?” he asked.

“These many *katuns*,” answered the stranger. “My people will be happy now that Ra has sent his offering.”

“What’s a *katun* an’ who’s Ra?” asked Brick.

“You know well that a *katun* is a period of twenty years and makes one of yours.” The man paused and looked around at his awed followers. “You also know that Ra, the sun god, sent you to us as he promised.”

Brick shook his head slowly and then mumbled, “He’s nuts, Cal.”

“How come you speak English?” asked the practical Cal.

“I shall tell you later,” said the tall stranger. “You will get in. My people wait. You are safe with me.”

Cal slid down into the dugout and smiled confidently at the muscular crew sitting at the paddles. “Come on, Brick!” he called as he seated himself.

Brick looked up into the burnished blue dome of the heavens. “Come on, Marines,” he said huskily.

THE man in the brilliant robes swung around, and a torrent of words drifted out over the rippling waters. The natives smiled. Finally he looked up at Brick and said, “I have just told my people that you are praying to your gods.”

Brick’s face took on a sickly grin. “You’re right, old-timer. I was sort of prayin’, but to a bunch that think they’re little tin gods.”

“Tin gods?”

“Yeah, tin, but they got a lot of brass in ’em,” grinned Brick as he settled himself in the dugout and raised his face to the skies again. “Come on, Marines,” he breathed, and the dark-skinned people around him smiled.

Cal leaned forward and tapped Brick on the shoulder. “Take a look at the gang on shore, will you?”

Brick looked. His face was a shade paler as he raised his head heavenward. He listened for a moment, but only a low chant coming from the crowded shore reached his freckled ears. At last he turned. "I don't like it, Cal, not for a damn."

"Well, why don't you go somewhere else, then?"

The dugout slid up on the shore, and before either of the two men could move, natives had waded into the water and were lifting them out with eager hands, carrying them to dry land.

Laughing faces greeted them on all sides as the tall stranger walked to a litter by the side of the trail and picked up two large bundles. He shook them out into the sunlight and advanced on the two puzzled flyers, who gasped as the sun picked up the brilliant coloring.

"Feather robes," breathed Cal in amazement. "Look at the colors, will you?"

The stranger walked solemnly up to Cal and put the long robe over his shoulders. "These have not been worn for many *katuns*." He turned and slipped the remaining robe around Brick's body.

Brick swung around as a hand grasped him by the arm and pointed toward a litter. He looked over at Cal a moment, then settled himself on the painted frame and looked skyward again. His lips moved as stalwart arms picked up the litter and started down the path.

"My people wish to know if you are still praying," the tall stranger called from the litter at Brick's side.

"You're darn right I'm praying," replied Brick. "An' what's more, I'm gonna keep right on."

The procession wound its way through the shaded trail. The chant increased in volume as newcomers stepped from the leafy shadows, threw fragrant flowers on the litter carrying the two men, and then faded back to join the train.

"You'd think we'd flown the Atlantic, or something," said Brick.

Cal only said, "Better keep working on your Marines," and then turned to study the broadening trail. They were now traversing what had once been a highway.

Through the moss and vines he could see the outline of huge stone blocks lining the path.

The procession grew in numbers. The weird chant grew stronger. The flowers covered the two feather-robed men and trailed over the edge of their litters. Then their carriers turned off the path, heading for a towering mass of gray stone. A door swung open and they left the light of the morning.

"**N**OW what?" demanded Cal as he let the hot robe slip to his feet. "We're in a temple of some sort. Being treated like gods, too."

Brick studied Cal's face for a moment and then said, "Cal, it's that yellow beard of yours they're all interested in. Gosh, when you get all dolled up in those feathers and that yellow mass of hair sticks over the edge, you look just like a god. Honest, I don't like it a bit. They seem nice an' friendly an' all that, but there's dirty work off the bow. An' then lockin' us in this room! If we were gods, they'd give us the run of the place. There must be a reason."

"There is," said Cal, looking around the white-walled room, with its strange paintings and hieroglyphic inscriptions. "The reason is—Tordino."

"Tordino!" exclaimed Brick.

"Yes, I think it is Tordino," said Cal quietly. "The old bird with the soft voice. Remember what Nathan said about his being a high priest?"

"Yes, an' I remember him sayin' something about human sacrifice. I don't like the way that old bird looks at me at all." Brick paused, his red head cocked over one shoulder. "Sh-sh-h-h," he said. "I hear somebody comin'."

Somebody was coming. Footsteps sounded dully against the stone blocks outside the room. Then the footsteps halted, and a key rasped in the antique lock. The door swung open and a tall man and two natives stepped into the room.

"You are hungry?" asked the aged one.

"Yes, Tordino," snapped Cal, playing his hunch. "We're hungry."

"You know me, then," said the tall man with a crafty smile.

"Sure, we knew you all the time," lied Brick, edging closer to Cal. "What do you want to hold us here for? We're anxious to be on our way."

"Tomorrow morning, as Ra comes out of the east, you shall go on your way." There was an ominous ring to Tordino's voice. He motioned the two natives closer to his side and then turned to face his two captives again. "Until then you shall live like the gods these people think you are. Then they will send you back to Ra."

"Just what do you mean?" asked Cal.

"I mean this," said Tordino. "These people have prayed a long time for a sign which was promised to their ancestors many years ago. Today the sign came down from the skies in the shape of two humans, one of whom wears the golden beard. It is unfortunate for you, and very fortunate for me. My hold was slipping, but today you came, and they believe again. Tomorrow at dawn they will offer you up to Ra, from whom they believe you were sent."

"You mean they are going to kill us?"

Tordino nodded. A smile flicked across his cruel face. "Tomorrow you will die on top of the pyramid."

"Say," Brick interrupted, "you got a racket or something down here, haven't you? How come you speak English like a Yank and the others don't?"

Tordino hesitated a moment and then shrugged his shoulders. "I might as well tell you," he said. "You die tomorrow, and these two men do not understand our language. I have a racket. I expect to become wealthy, and your deaths will bring me the riches I seek." He paused. "My father was a high priest long years ago. I was to be one, too, but I ran away to the coast. Then I got to the States and worked in New Orleans, but I did not get rich. I slaved and worked for you white men. Then one day I thought of the wealth which lay down here in the temples of my native land."

"So you came back and started your dirty work to get a little gold," Cal said fearlessly.

"Not a little gold—much gold," Tordino smiled, "and jewels. Jewels which came to this land when Atlantis was still a continent. Now you have come, and tomorrow I will know where the treasures of my people are kept when they bring out the sacrificial robes and jewels. Then—"

"Then you'll beat it," snarled Brick, eyeing the glinting daggers held toward him by the natives.

"Yes." Tordino chuckled softly. "Back to where life is life, only you need riches to live it. Till tomorrow, gentlemen, you will live like gods. Enjoy life while you can."

Tordino stepped quickly from the room. The two condemned men stood alone. Food was brought to them—food and drink served on golden plates and silver goblets. The men were hungry. They ate, and then they slept.

MORNING came, and with it a low chant drifted through the high, barred windows. Cal pulled himself erect on the cushioned stone bed and tried to bring his hands to his face. Then he discovered that they were securely bound behind his back. His ankles had been tied the same way.

"Brick," he called softly. "Wake up!"

A muffled yawn and then an oath sounded in the semi-darkness. "They got us trussed up, Cal. Musta doped us with that drink. I don't remember a darned thing. What time is it, anyway?"

"Morning," came Cal's quiet reply.

"Morning!" Brick echoed as he recalled the words of Tordino. "They're gonna rub us out."

The chant grew clearer. Footsteps sounded on the flags outside the cell-like room. The key rasped again, and Tordino, backed by half a dozen torchbearers, stood in the room.

"Come. Ra will soon be in the heaven." His voice was hollow as he glared across the room at the two men. "You must be dressed for your death. I must see you prepared with your robes." He motioned for two of the torchbearers to step to the front. "Come quickly or I shall have

to use force. Do not forget you are gods." Tordino laughed thickly.

As a native cut the ropes around his ankles, Cal slipped over to Brick. "Buck up, kid. Maybe we can make a break for it outside. No use trying to put up a fight in here. They'd only crown us with a club."

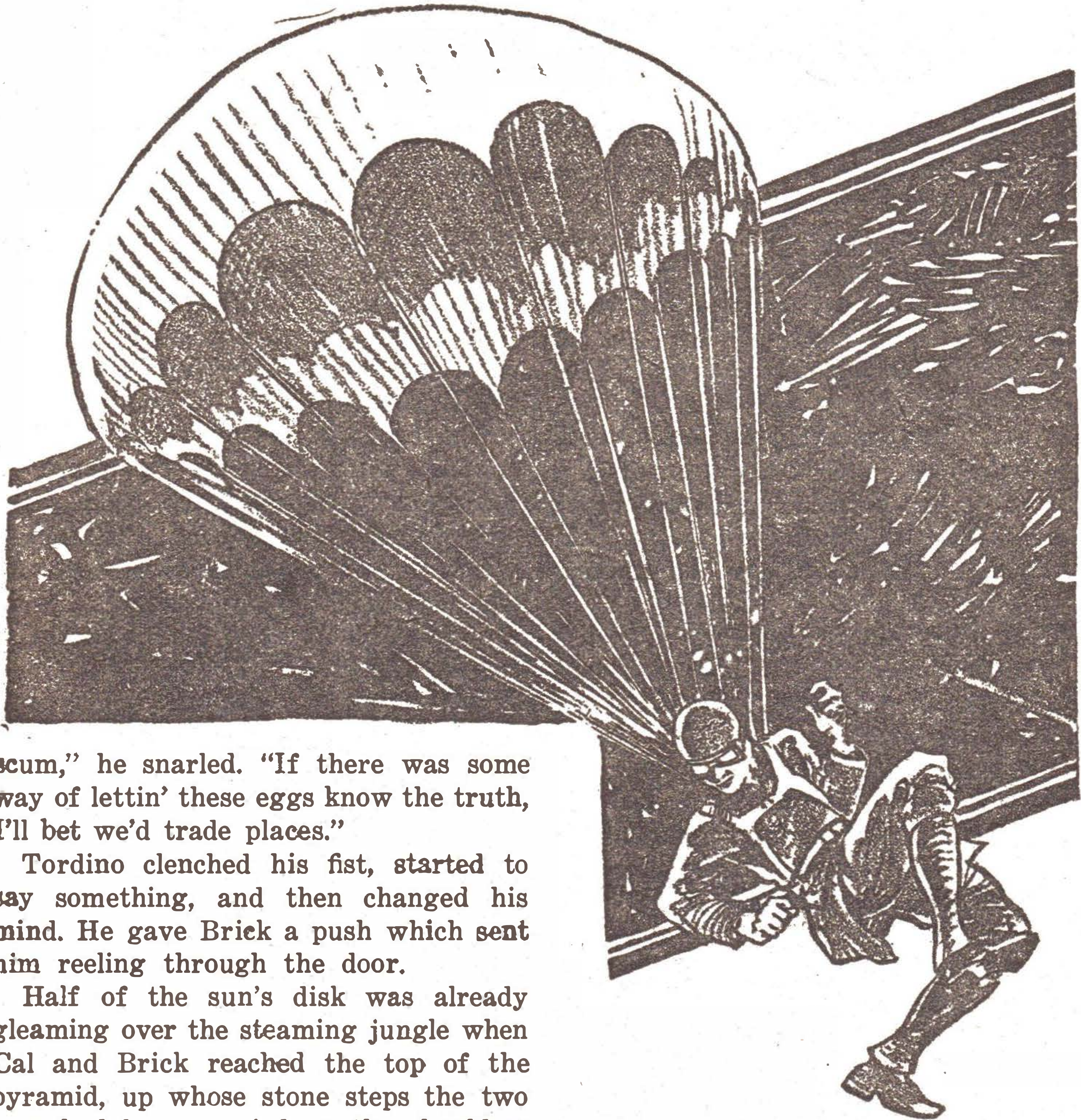
Brick followed Cal to the door, but paused as he reached Tordino. "You

tal ring resting on the top.

"When the sun reaches that ring," said Tordino, "I will give the signal and the knives will cut into your hearts."

"An' this is some of the booty you're after," muttered Brick, indicating a golden plate suspended around his neck by a heavy gold chain. "This hunk of glass won't get you much."

"That is a diamond," said Tordino.



scum," he snarled. "If there was some way of lettin' these eggs know the truth, I'll bet we'd trade places."

Tordino clenched his fist, started to say something, and then changed his mind. He gave Brick a push which sent him reeling through the door.

Half of the sun's disk was already gleaming over the steaming jungle when Cal and Brick reached the top of the pyramid, up whose stone steps the two men had been carried on the shoulders of a chanting crew of gaudily dressed natives.

At word of command from Tordino, they were laid on two oblong rocks at the summit, and bronze rings were clamped around their arms just above their elbows. Ahead of them and just between the two stones on which they lay was a thin spire of rock with a crys-

"It came across the seas hundreds of years ago while this was a great civilization. It and the one on your friend's chest are worth a fortune. They are brought out only on sacrificial occasions."

"A real diamond!" Brick for the moment forgot about his rôle in the coming show as he stared down in wonder at the bauble resting against his flesh. He

moved his hands and discovered that he could reach the plate. He tipped it up and looked into the glittering facets of the gem. "Big as a walnut," he muttered.

The piping of reed instruments reached his ears and he dropped the plate back on his chest as he stretched to look down the long steps leading to the top. Coming up the steps like a long green snake was a procession of natives, each carrying the branch of a tree in his hand. The shrill noise grew louder, and the dull tones of the chant broke out on the air. Up and up the procession wended its tortuous way until the leaders reached the top. There they paused.

Tordino gave a low command, and the shirts were stripped from the bodies of the two prostrate men. From the waist down they were covered with feather robes which were cleverly woven of plaited snakeskin.

"Guess the jig's about up, Brick," Cal said softly.

Brick wasn't listening to what Cal was saying. He was straining against his bonds and looking up into the eastern sky.

"No good yellin' for them now, Brick."

"But they're comin', Cal. I hear them." The light of hope gleamed in Brick's face. "There they are!"

CAL lifted his head, only to have it rudely pushed back to the stone by Tordino. "Lie still," commanded the high priest. "There is no use looking for help. They can't see you from that height."

"Come on, Marines!" Brick shouted, and the people smiled. They had heard that call before, and their priest had told them it was a prayer.

Tordino spoke to the people assembled on the steps, and then swung around to the two men. "I have told them that those planes are visitors from Ra waiting to carry your souls to him. They believe."

The sun crept higher. Its edge was just below the rim of the crystal ring. Already two natives had taken their stand, one at each stone. In their hands they gripped long knives.

Cal looked at one of the blades and

then turned toward Brick with a shudder. "Only a couple of minutes now, Brick, old boy. See you later."

Brick did not reply. He was too busy playing with the diamond-studded plate on his chest. Sweat poured from under his red hair as his trembling fingers moved the golden disk around. He gave it three quick jerks and then let it rest momentarily on his chest. Then it flicked up again, this time more slowly. It rose and fell three times. Then came the three quick motions again. Once again he repeated the maneuver with the golden plate. His breath whistled between his clenched teeth as he lay back and watched the rim of the sun creep up to the circle of crystal.

The ships roared overhead—just dots in the skies. The roar ceased.

"They're signaling okay, Cal," screamed Brick. "They've seen us. Come on, Marines!"

The faint scream of the flying wires reached the natives as they stood in hushed awe, watching the three planes swooping down at the mass of stone on which they stood. On and on they came. The scream of the wires grew in a weird crescendo. The roar of motors seemed to fill the sky.

As the ships came on, Brick began working the plate for dear life, and in brief abbreviated words told of the dilemma they were in. The diamond told the story in sparkles and flashes as the ships banked low over the pyramid.

Brick was too busy to see the two natives with the knives struggling with Tordino. Tordino knew that his time was up. But the two brown men, believing that gods had shapes like human beings, thought that Ra was sending a message out of the blue.

There was a message from above. The two brown-skinned natives held their knives to Tordino's chest as they watched three specks of white drifting through the air toward the pyramid.

Cal laughed hysterically as he watched the first of the three chutes settle halfway up the long steps. A minute later a figure had emerged from its silken folds and was running toward them. Another

landed at the foot of the steps, and a third.

"Come on, Marines," Brick laughed over and over. Then he stopped. He saw a brown figure fall to the stone, clutching at his stomach. There was a scream in back of him, and he looked just in time to see the other executioner throw his hands into the air and tumble off into nothing. For a moment he thought he was going to faint as he looked up into the cruel, burning eyes of Tordino, who stood with a knife clutched in his up-raised hand.

"It was your fault that I failed," came the menacing tones of the man standing over him. "You shall die first."

There was a stuttering crash. A weight fell across his chest, moved convulsively, and then lay still. Brick opened his eyes in time to see the knife clatter to the stone floor and pick up the reflection of the sun. They raised to look into the smiling eyes of the man standing over him. It was a Marine.

Then a voice spoke. "Gotta make it snappy, buddy. We can pick up a column about two miles from here."

THE two bedraggled aerial photographers were sitting on the dusty porch of what passed for a hotel down there in Portoex, when three figures in the uniform of Marine pilots drifted up.

"Hello there, Lieutenant Nathan. Hello, Lieutenant Cruthers," said Brick, getting to his feet.

"Where's Cal?" asked Nathan.

"Gettin' a shave."

"Thought he wasn't going to shave till he got money enough for a new bus."

"We got money," answered Brick casually. "I hung onto that diamond they had slung around my neck. The thing I flashed you with was a piece of real ice, worth plenty of sugar, they say. By the way, I'd like to have the addresses of you guys." Brick fished out a piece of paper. "I want to put you on my Christmas card list."

"Oh, yeah? Getting funny already." Nathan grinned and took a playful swing at Brick's red jaw. "What are you going to do now?"

"Get myself a drink. So come on, Marines!"



A Flying Family

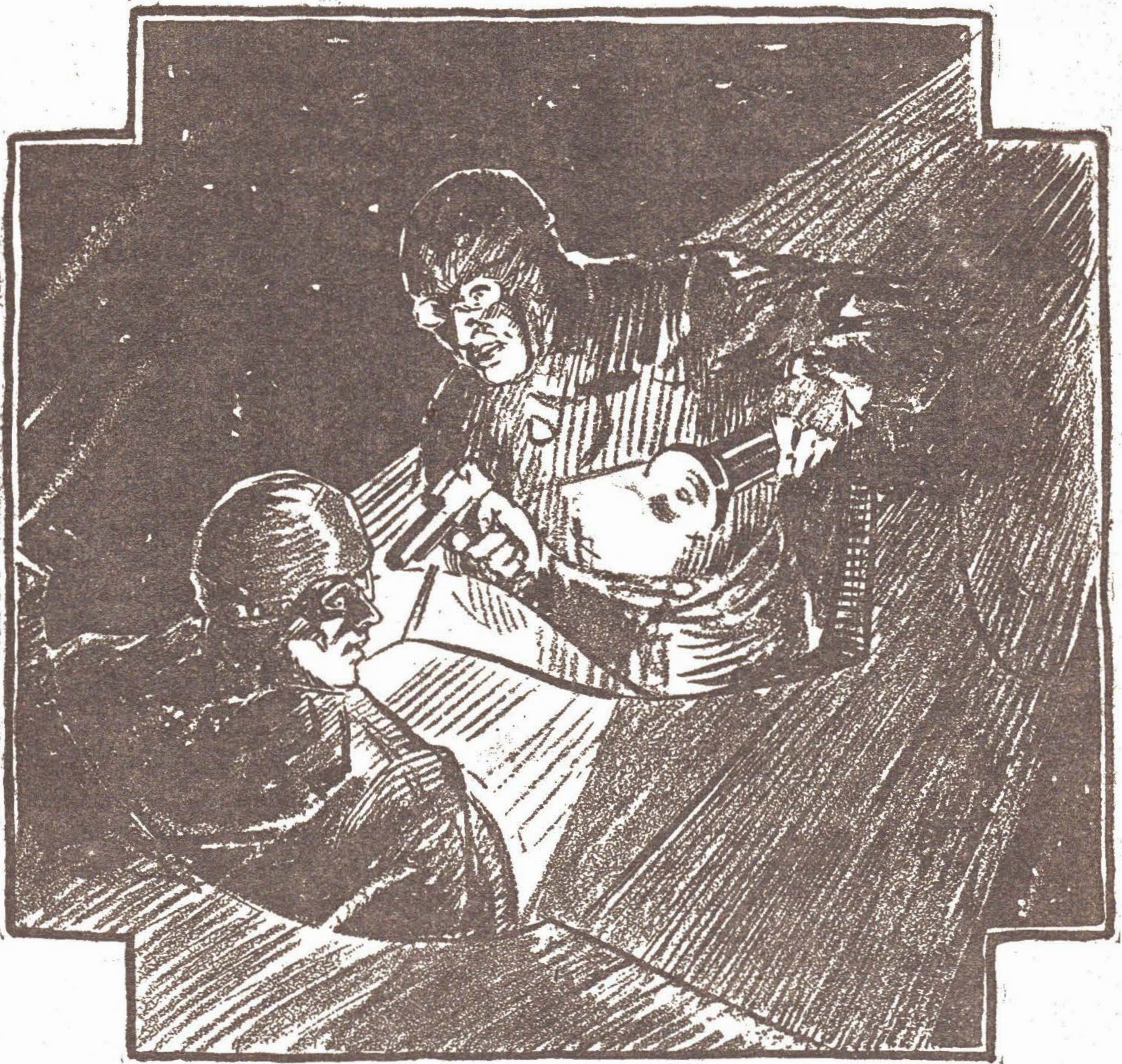
ACCORDING to the Air Corps News Letter correspondent of the 120th Observation Squadron, Colorado National Guard, aviation can boast of an unusual family.

Announcing that word had been received that Harold Montee, a former member of the 120th Squadron, resigned as aeronautical inspector for the Civil Aeronautics Authority in its Kansas City offices to become branch manager in the Chicago headquarters of an aviation insurance company. The correspondent goes on to say that Harold Montee's older brother, Kenneth, was a wartime instructor in flying who, after thousands of hours of instruction flying and barnstorming after the War, died of scarlet fever in 1926.

In 1919, however, Kenneth taught his two brothers, Harold (17) and Ralph (18) to fly. Among them the three brothers also taught their father to fly. And at the age of 60, Mr. Montee acquired a private pilot's license which he kept up until his seventieth birthday, six years ago.

Harold Montee was the first passenger transport pilot in Southern California, flying from Los Angeles to the Imperial Valley in 1921. He and his brothers were early operators of the Mercury Flying Service at Clover Field, Santa Monica, Calif., of which William C. de Mille was President. And they did much of the stunt flying that appeared in motion pictures at that time.

Riddle of the Raid



The man in the rear cockpit held a pistol to his head all the way back.

By STEWART POWELL

The stick jerked out of that Yank pilot's hand and he whirled around. There, in the rear cockpit, his two passengers were fighting like madmen, trying to hurl each other out of the ship. Yet the Yank could do nothing—he did not know which of those men was the spy!

BUCK REMSON, B flight leader of the U. S. 59th, felt the stick of the Bristol kick wildly about as if the bus were being rocked by bursts of archie fire. But not a single black ball had crumped around the ship.

Only one thing could cause that jumping in a quiet sky, Buck realized. One of

those birds in the back cockpit must be monkeying with the dual control socket, trying to force the bus off its course.

Buck glanced behind him at the two passengers whom he had already brought well over the German lines. One of them was a tall, blond fellow in white coveralls, with a tunic bearing the insignia

of a U. S. Air Service captain. The other was a short, red-headed sergeant whose papers identified him as a member of the Intelligence service.

As Buck looked about, he started; then, his eyes almost bulging from his head, he swung around in his seat to watch the two.

His passengers were fighting like madmen—trying to hurl each other out of the Bristol. As Buck watched, the stocky sergeant smacked a right to the jaw of the tall blond, who crumpled and slipped out of sight down into the cockpit.

Buck nosed down, cut the Hisso, and shouted back, "What's the idea?"

The non-com pointed at the floor below him. "This bird is double-crossing us," he called out. "Turn around and go back, or I'm going to throw him over board."

Buck shook his head. "Can't do that. We've got to land him at Rauchenfels—and get the other fellow."

The eyes of the sergeant narrowed, and his right hand snaked inside his tunic, flashing into sight with the muzzle of a Colt covering the Yank."

"We're not going to Rauchenfels," he snapped. "It's a trap. You'll go where I tell you."

Buck gasped. What could be the meaning of this action by a man he supposed to belong to Intelligence. His mind racing, his thoughts went back to the office of Colonel Bullock, Wing Intelligence chief, where early that morning he had reported, following a call for special duty by Major Hardy, C. O. of the 59th.

"I have asked your commandant to furnish one of his best pilots," the colonel had said. "A man who will follow orders, but who can use initiative. Such a man we must have—for the success of an attack by the American army will depend upon him. If the attack fails, it means the loss of thousands of American lives."

Buck had nodded that he understood.

"One of our best operatives, G-9," the Intelligence chief went on, "is posing as a German officer at a camp near Rauchenfels. He possesses information which we must have—information which will make our attack a success. Your task is

to land at Rauchenfels and bring him back."

"What about my observer?" Buck asked.

"There will be no room for him," was the reply. "Two of our men are going with you. One will remain hidden in your rear cockpit. If you meet the enemy, our other man will act the part of a German spy who has forced you to fly back to the Fatherland. If you land unobserved, he will remain at Rauchenfels. Is it clear?"

"All but one thing," Buck told him. "How am I to know your man—G-9?"

"When you reach Rauchenfels," the colonel answered, "you will receive a signal from a field just east of the camp. That is where you will land and pick up G-9. When you meet, G-9 will ask you a question containing some number, to which you will reply with a sentence using another figure. He will then say something more, his words giving you the sum of the numbers you and he have mentioned."

Again Buck nodded. "Very well, sir," he replied.

EARLY that afternoon he had stood upon the tarmac of the 59th at the hour appointed. Roaring down the shell-torn road from Vismettes had come a staff Cadillac, from which two figures climbed and approached him.

Presenting credentials which satisfied Major Hardy, they had got into the rear pit and ridden there quietly as it soared above the lines. Then, miles inside of Germany, the antics of the bus as they fought had warned Buck that something was in the wind.

Once more he looked back at the sergeant.

"Turn around, I tell you!" the fellow was shouting angrily. "This man back here is—"

White streaks of tracer whipped past his shoulder, coming straight out of the sun. As Buck kicked the bus aside in a yawing skid, another line of telltale wisps crossed the first.

Spandaus yammering as they came, two black-crossed Halberstadt scouts were hurtling downward, their tracers

creeping nearer to the Yank ship. Buck whipped the bus over on a wing tip, striving to get the nose around where he could bring his Vickers into play. "Can't figure that red-head," he told himself. "I've got to play a lone hand."

Suddenly the sharp, familiar "brrapp-a-trrapp-trrapp" of Lewis guns blared out from the rear pit. Casting a glance behind, Buck saw that the non-com was handling the guns and pumping lead at the nearest Halberstadt.

As he watched, the Jerry ship Immel-manned away, and the sergeant lifted his fire to the other, which rolled and flew directly above the Bristol.

Buck's thumbs tightened on his Bowdens as he zoomed. But before he could ring either of the Halberstadts in his sights, the one above turned back and both the Jerries were once more in position to lash the Yank ship.

Once more the "brrapp-trrapp" of the Lewis snarled from the rear pit of the Bristol. The sergeant was a real scrapper with the guns, Buck could tell.

Tails thrown suddenly to the sky, the two Boche ships dived, converging their fire upon the empennage of the Yank ship. Buck kicked over into a screaming slip followed by a bank, and again the Lewis guns chattered.

Suddenly the Lewis cut out, and Buck felt the Bristol lurch and lighten, swinging easily as he jockeyed the controls. At the same time, the fire from the Jerry ship ceased.

ONCE more Buck glanced about the sky, and, as his eyes flashed past the right wing tip of the Bristol, he gasped.

Hurtling downward with arms and legs outstretched, as if trying to check the speed of its fall, a human body was plunging earthward. "God," Buck muttered. "It's the captain—the sergeant's done him in."

Then, as he looked back into the rear cockpit of the ship, his stomach turned to ice.

Standing in the pit, his face hard, and his deep blue eyes glinting cruelly, was the tall, blond figure. But now no Yank

wings showed at the collar or on the breast of the remaining passenger in the Bristol. The tunic the tall, blond fellow wore was black, and bore insignia which marked the wearer as a captain in the Kaiser's Imperial Air Service!

The blond chap had stripped off his helmet and goggles, and was signaling to the pilots of the Halberstadts, who were nodding in return and had brought their ships close above the tail of the Bristol.

Buck's right hand crept toward the fasteners of his Sidcott suit, where beneath his left arm his Colt was holstered. If he could only reach that!

At a sharp rap on the shoulder he turned, to find himself staring into the barrel of an automatic. "Play the game, you fool," the blond fellow snarled. "You're supposed to be obeying me. Do what I tell you."

Buck nodded, but his heart sank at the words. What was the idea of the blond suddenly appearing in German uniform, and why had the sergeant insisted that the landing at Rauchenfels was a trap? And who the devil were the two of them, anyway?

Now the passenger was tapping his shoulder again, leaning forward, and shouting, "There's the field. Circle over it and watch for your signal."

Buck put the Bristol into an easy bank, and the two Halberstadts hovered above it as they soared over the small clearing that lay just east of Rauchenfels. Anti-aircraft shells began to burst about the Bristol, but at a signal from the tall, blond passenger the two German ships drew closer and waggled their wing tips. The firing from the ground ceased abruptly.

Hovering lower over the field, Buck peered downward for some sign that might indicate that G-9 was awaiting him. The operative would flash a *panneau* signal, he remembered. That would mean Morse dots and dashes in black and white.

As he watched, a figure darted from the woods which bordered the field. Rushing into the center of the clearing, it

hurled itself to the ground, lying flat, gazing steadily at the Bristol.

While Buck looked, the figure began to flap its arms, opening and shutting the front of a dark cloak which it wore. Buck studied the actions, then nodded with satisfaction.

Lined with some light-colored material, the cloak made a *panneau* shutter as the figure closed and opened it. His eyes glued to the flashes, Buck spelled out the Morse letters as they formed a word.

"D-A-N-G-E-R," he read.

NO SOONER was the signal completed than the figure bounded to its feet and dashed into the woods, leaving no sign of life about the clearing.

"There's your man," the chap in the rear cockpit of the bus called out as he leaned forward.

Buck peered cautiously at the ground, scanning the field and the edges of the woods for possible ambush. Could the sergeant have been right, he wondered, as he thought of his passenger's switch to the Jerry uniform, and the understanding which seemed to exist between him and the pilots of the Halberstadts?

"Go on and land, or these other pilots will smell a rat," the tall chap was saying, and once more Buck felt the barrel of the automatic against his neck.

"Only one thing to do," Buck determined. "If I don't land, I'll never get G-9. I've got to carry him back—got to have that information for the attack tonight."

Cutting the gun of the Bristol, he nosed down in narrowing circles, then slipped the bus toward the earth and landed.

As if at some prearranged signal, a squad of Jerry infantrymen, headed by a non-com and under the command of a sharp-faced *Leutnant*, came from the woods. The soldiers held rifles ready, and both the *Leutnant* and the *Unteroffizier* carried pistols which they thrust forward to cover the two in the Yank ship.

As the Jerry soldiers approached, the two Halberstadts slipped down to landings, one on each side of the field. Climb-

ing from their cockpits, the pilots joined the group which was closing in on the Bristol.

"Now's the time for this blond chap to do his stuff," the Yank told himself. "If he talks them out of this, I know his name. He's Houdini!"

But the passenger showed no intention of trying to help. As the German soldiery surrounded the plane, he smiled at the sharp-faced *Leutnant* and spoke in an officious, guttural tone.

"*Ich heiss von Pflanz*," he barked as he produced a packet of papers and tossed them to the Boche officer. "*Herr Hauptmann Werner von Pflanz*."

"*Hauptmann von Pflanz*?" Buck repeated to himself, his heart sinking. Among all the secret agents of the *Wilhelmstrasse* there was none who had scored against the Yanks with more success than von Pflanz!

Still, Buck figured, the fellow in the rear pit might only be bluffing, might be playing his part until some break would give the two of them a chance to get out of Germany. "Even at that, we couldn't do any good without G-9," Buck reflected. "Who the devil is he, and where is he hiding himself?"

AT the mention of the name von Pflanz, Buck had seen the Jerry soldiers stiffen and turn admiring eyes upon the blond chap. The *Leutnant* caught the packet of papers and was looking through them impassively, his face a mask on which no expression could be discerned.

When he had finished his inspection he turned a cold stare upon the man who had announced himself as the ace of Boche spies.

"A very pretty story," the *Leutnant* pronounced stiffly. "A story that would bring you a welcome anywhere on this side of the lines if—" here he paused and shifted his Luger as his eyes bore into the features of the blond chap—"if we did not happen to know that *Herr Hauptmann von Pflanz* is a prisoner of the Americans!"

Buck gasped. The real von Pflanz a prisoner? Then who could the blond be?

Perhaps his story was on the level, and he was actually a member of the U. S. Intelligence.

But the blond only looked annoyed at the words of the Leutnant, and now fairly hurled his words at the German officer. "*Dumkopf*—I tell you that I am Werner von Pflanz. Take me to your commandant at once."

The *Leutnant* shook his head, then turned to Buck.

"What have you to say for yourself? Is it true—what this one says?"

In spite of himself Buck started. "He will ask you something containing a number," he remembered that the Intelligence chief had instructed him as his means of identifying G-9. And he was to answer with a sentence containing another figure. Could this Jerry officer be the American agent, Buck asked himself. If so, he would recognize the Yank signal in reply.

Buck thought fast. It was up to him to give an answer that would enable G-9 to make himself known, but at the same time he must keep faith with the fellow in the back pit.

"He rushed me when I was trying to get off, after a landing two miles from our drome," he stated as he tried to keep his voice calm. "Then he forced me to fly him here. That is all I can tell you."

The *Leutnant* chuckled grimly. "Three times today American planes have come over this place," he answered. "The others have been shot down, and now you come, flying with these Halberstadts like brothers."

Buck kept his face expressionless, but his mind was revving wildly. The figure three, given by the *Leutnant*, had been the signal that he was G-9!

ON the ground beside the Bristol, the Jerry officer was staring at the blond chap in the back pit, shaking his head as if he could not decide whether the story told was true. "I will have you taken to the commandant," he told the man who called himself von Pflanz. "Drop your pistol and come down here."

The blond hesitated, seeming to be searching the features of the Jerries for

some sign of recognition. Their faces wore puzzled expressions, except for the *Unteroffizier*, in whose shrewd, suspicious eyes a look of understanding was growing as he glanced from one officer to the other.

"Do as I tell you," rapped out the *Leutnant*. "I will disarm this American, and take him to our prison camp at Wiedenbach in his own plane."

The face of the tall chap in the rear cockpit hardened, and he flashed a look of triumph at the officer on the ground.

"Now I see your plan, Yankee *Schwein*," he sneered. "Even without your *panneau* signal I should have recognized you. So you thought to escape in this plane? A very clever scheme—if it had worked."

The face of the *Leutnant* showed no fear, but Buck saw the knuckles of his hand turn white as he gripped the Luger. The blond turned to the non-com who headed the squad. "Sergeant," he shot out, "I command you to arrest this man who is masquerading as an officer of the *Vaterland*."

The *Unteroffizier* stepped toward the *Leutnant*, barking an order to the soldiers behind him, who raised their rifles and pointed them at the man who had posed as their commander.

"*Hande hoch*," the sergeant snapped, and the hands of the *Leutnant* went skyward, his Luger dropping.

The tall, blond chap vaulted from the rear cockpit and stood beside the Bristol, his automatic covering Buck. "Come down here," he ordered.

As Buck climbed down and faced him, the German sergeant turned to the soldiers and pointed toward the Yank ship. "Take the belts out of those front guns, and throw all the ammunition from the rear pit," he directed.

A couple of the Jerries went over the Bristol, ripping the feeds from the Vickers and tearing the drums from their racks beneath the Lewis guns in the back cockpit. Inwardly, Buck groaned as he saw them hurl all of the ammo to the ground.

Meanwhile, with his pistol covering Buck, the blond fellow was questioning G-9, trying to trip him up and force

him to confess his part as an American agent. But the man in the uniform of the German *Leutnant* was cool and collected, and answered the questions and taunts with air-tight replies and a smile.

Buck stood with arms folded across his chest, his right hand hiding the slight bulge beneath his left arm.

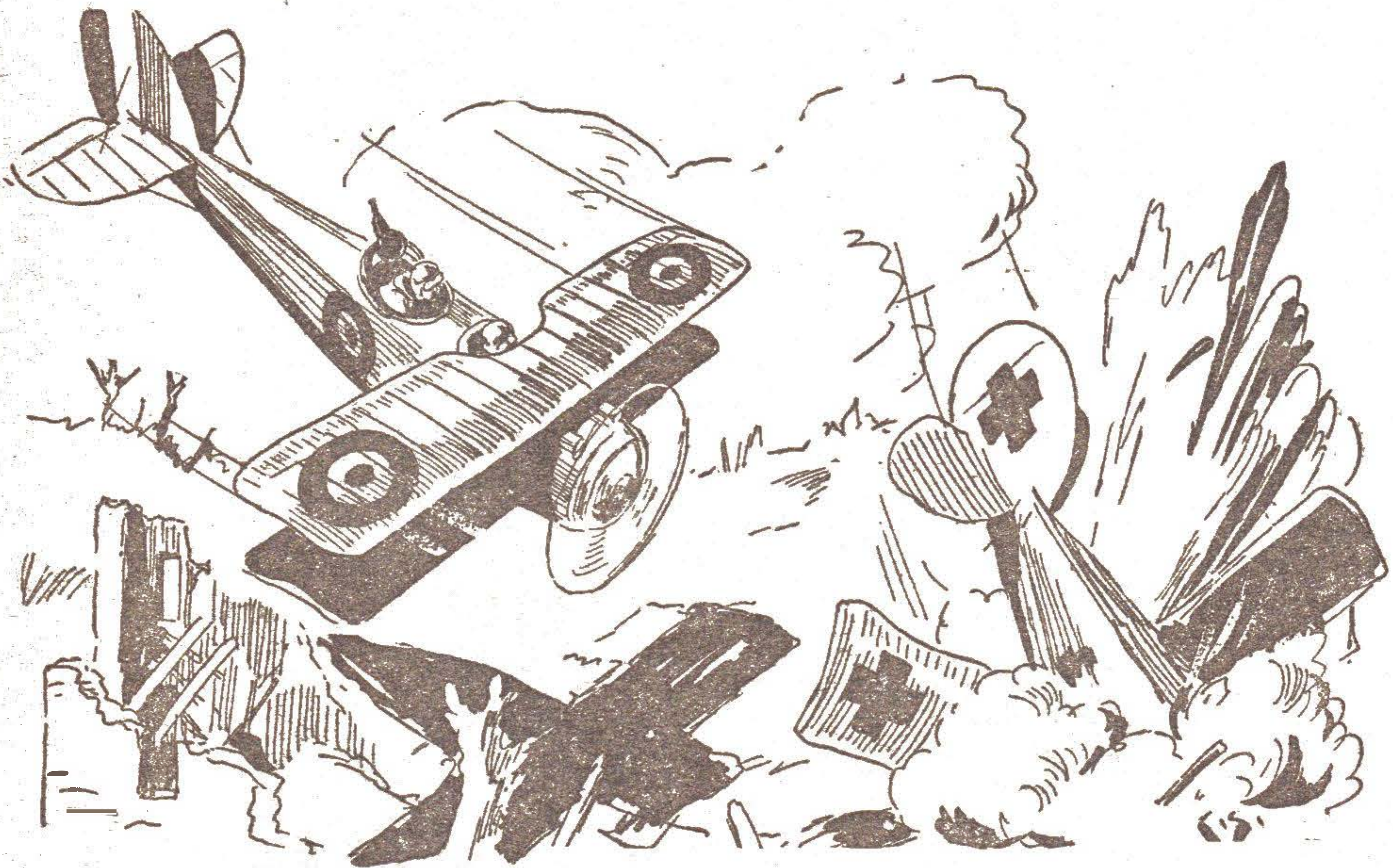
At last the temper of the German master spy seemed exhausted, and, turning his back toward Buck for an instant, he stepped forward and struck G-9 brutally across the face.

LIKE a flash Buck leaped forward, standing behind the blond chap and whipping the automatic from his hol-

post and pushing the stick forward as the engine bellowed out.

The tail came up, and as G-9 pulled the inert form from the wing into the rear pit the bus roared along the ground. Behind it, Buck could see the two Halberstadts rock as the pilots flung themselves into their places, while the squad of Jerry soldiers was firing at the Bristol.

German lead snapped about the ears of the two Yanks, whipping through the wings of the ship and stabbing viciously at the struts and engine cowling. But the gallant Bristol was in the air, and as Buck drew the stick back it zoomed and cleared the treetops at the edge of



ster. With the weapon reversed, he brought the butt down sharply against the head of the covered figure, at the same time catching the fellow's body in his left arm and holding it before him as a shield against the guns of the Jerry soldiers.

"The back cockpit, quick," he shouted to G-9, who wheeled and scrambled into the Bristol as the Yank backed toward it. Still holding the human shield before him, Buck reached the bus, tossing the limp figure upon the wing nearest to the Boche troops. Then with one mad spring he was in the cockpit of the ship, shoving the throttle of the Hiss against the

the field.

Buck banked and roared back toward the Halberstadts. One of them was almost ready to leave the ground, he saw. Shoving the nose of the Bristol down, Buck hurled it toward the German ship, his Colt gleaming in his free hand.

Down across the field the Yank ship flung, tilting on a wing tip as it reached the level of the treetops, and plunging straight for the Halberstadt. Over its cockpit Buck leaned from his own nacelle, the automatic in his hand barking sharply as the Bristol flashed by. The body of the pilot crumpled and the German ship reared up in one short, mad zoom, then

cartwheeled and drove downward, crashing to earth.

Buck glanced about, noting that the second Halberstadt was off the ground.

Pushing the Hisso for its last ounce of speed, he headed for it, ruddering right, then left, and jockeying the bus to avoid the blast which was lashing from the Spandaus above the Mercedes. The Jerry tracer was streaking through the sky above him, but as the German pilot found the range the center section of the Bristol cracked wide and part of the fabric ripped away.

Buck kicked into a skid, then once more nosed down, charging madly for the whirring prop of the Jerry ship.

STRAIGHT for the center of the Mercedes, full into the yammering muzzles of the German guns, he drove the Bristol onward. At his side, the leather of the cockpit cowling jerked and tore as the Jerry lead scored again. Above him the center-section fabric flapped ribbons that flung out behind the Yank ship like streamers of defeat. Beneath him, the flooring splintered as the withering blast from killer Spandaus hammered through.

Buck felt a smashing thud against his shoulder, sensed that his right arm was now a throbbing streak of burning anguish. Instinctively he switched his left hand to the stick, once more driving the Bristol downward into that seething fire.

Like monsters the two ships roared together. Below the Hisso and Mercedes rang through the sky in the ghastly harmony of a weird death chant, the shrill challenge of the Hisso piercing the whrone-whrone of the Mercedes.

Nearer, nearer. As if some giant hand had flayed it with a rod of iron, a stabbing burst from the Spandaus lashed through Buck's instrument board. Angry whips of flying glass flung back, dashed against his cheeks and forehead.

On the ground, the Jerries had ceased their firing, gazing in amazement at the two ships. Nothing could save them from a collision now, it seemed. Yank and German would go down together, victims in common dust.

Clenching his teeth with pain as the stabbing agony of his wound seared his right arm and shoulder, Buck called upon the utmost of his flying skill. Judging the distance between the two ships to a hair, he rammed the prop of the Bristol inches from the jaws of the yammering Spandaus.

Suddenly he pulled the stick back.

Writhing and lurching through the air like a wounded bird, its right upper wing torn from its center-section by the undercarriage of the Yank ship, the Halberstadt seemed to hang suspended and shuddering for an instant above the clearing. Then it lunged into a slow, sickening spin.

Too near the ground to right the bus, the German pilot went plummeting to earth in a flapping coffin of ripped fabric and shattered spars. The Halberstadt buried its Mercedes four feet underground, shivered its wings into the sod, and lay still.

Above it, victor in one of the maddest duels of the war, the Yank ship staggered through the sky. In its cockpit Buck was fighting the controls, striving to manage the tail-heavy, logy bus. His right arm burned like a white-hot iron, and a dancing haze of blackness rising before his eyes, he swung the nose of the Bristol toward the lines.

A SHORT time later the staff car of Colonel Bullock, Wing Intelligence chief, ricocheted to a stop on the tarmac of the 59th. Before it ceased rolling, the colonel leaped out and addressed Major Hardy as he emerged from the operations tent.

"Did two men—one dressed as a sergeant, and the other a tall, blond Air Service captain—leave your field an hour ago?" the I. C. head rapped out.

"Yes," Major Hardy began. "One was—"

"One was von Pflanz, the German," the colonel broke in. "Captain Archer, of our staff, was to have gone over with our other man and your pilot, but he was drugged and knocked out and has just reported."

The eyes of the C. O. widened with

surprise; then his face hardened. "We'll follow them," he snapped. "I'll turn out every ship on the field."

As the two started on a run toward the hangars, one of the ackemmas sounded off, waving an arm toward the front. "Look," he shouted.

Following his gaze, they saw a flight of three Fokkers, apparently escorting one lone Bristol toward the Allied side. At the edge of Germany, white bursts of Yank archie began to smoke through the sky, and the Jerry ships turned back.

The lone Bristol continued on its way, its nose pointed in a dive for the tarmac of the 59th. Fabric was streaming from its wings, and even at a distance they could hear the Hisso laboring as it fought to keep the bus in the air.

As it neared, the major studied it with his binoculars. "That's Buck Remson at the stick," he announced, "but who the devil is that chap in the back—in the Jerry uniform?"

The colonel seized the glasses. "It's our operative G-9!" he exclaimed. "The mission is a success, even if von Pflanz did make his escape!"

The Bristol seemed to slump, barely clearing the hangars, its wings sagging and its undercarriage smashed to bits. As the ground crew ran for wheels to hold up as a signal to the pilot of the battered craft, the Hisso went out completely and the ship nosed earthward. With a rending creak of longerons it dragged its tailskid and smacked down

helplessly in a cloud of dust.

With the others from the squadron, the major and the I. C. chief rushed to the side of the crash. "Got to hand it to you, pilot," they heard G-9 say as he and Buck rose from the wreckage. "I thought those Fokkers upstairs had us cold, but your idea of kicking your Colt back and having me hold it to your head fooled them plenty."

"Congratulations, Remson," the colonel applauded as he reached Buck. "The whole second army owes you for this. I thought you were gone for good, when I learned that von Pflanz had got off from this drome."

Buck gestured toward the fuselage, from which the tall, blond fellow was crawling, gingerly rubbing his head where the butt of the Colt had landed. "Von Pflanz?" he repeated. "There he is now."

The colonel smiled.

"That man is Captain Harrison of our branch of the service," he told Buck. "He can act the part of a Jerry well enough the fool the Kaiser himself."

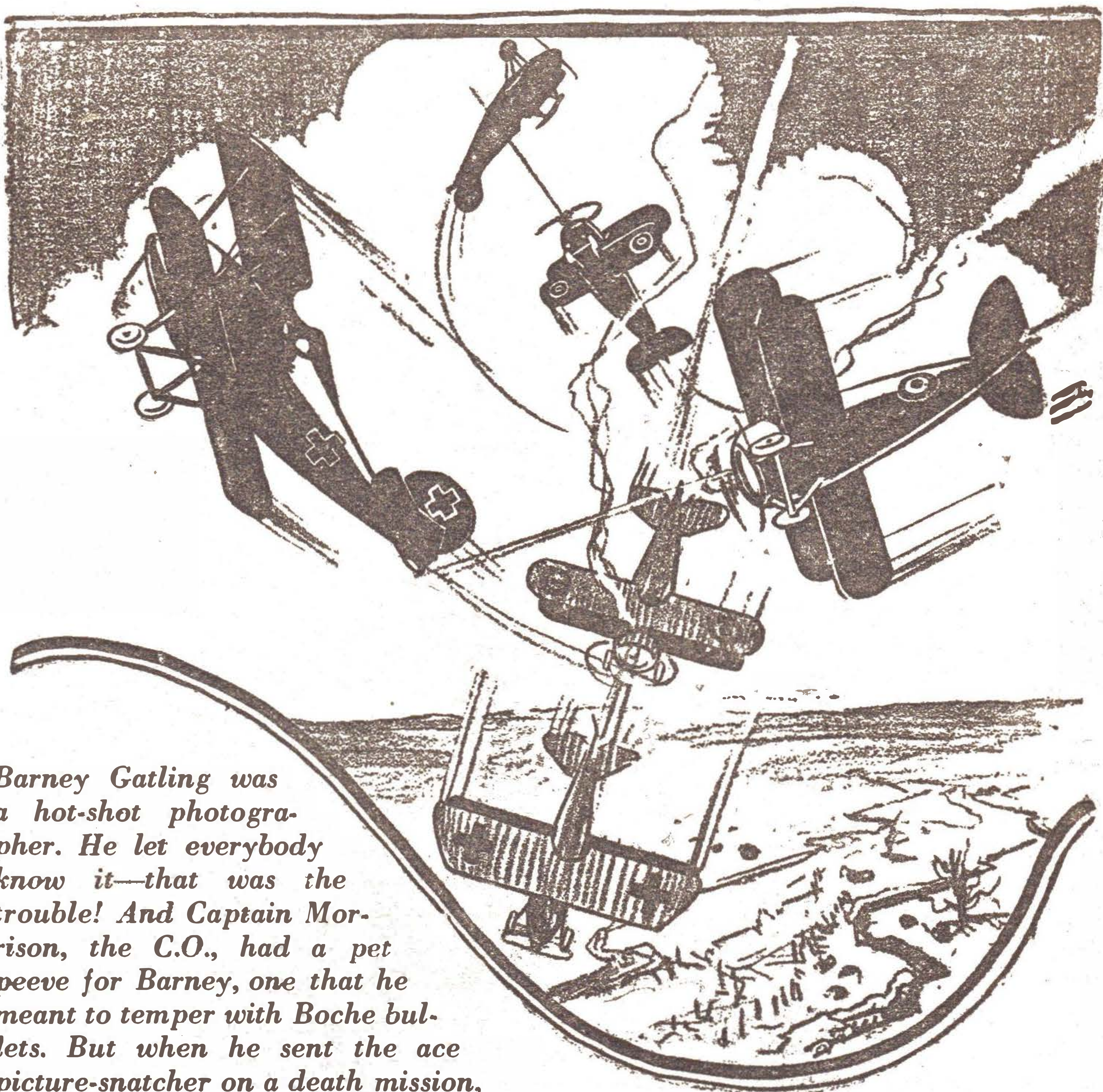
Buck's jaw dropped. "Beats me," he muttered. "Then who the devil is this von Pflanz, anyway—and what does he look like?"

The tall, blond chap's face grew solemn, as one who remembers a worthy foe, fallen but not dishonored.

"You saw him this afternoon," he told the skipper. "Von Pflanz was the sergeant—the third man in your ship when we started over the lines."



The Boche had something else to think about when Major Colby's Spads barged in!



Barney Gatling was a hot-shot photographer. He let everybody know it—that was the trouble! And Captain Morrison, the C.O., had a pet peeve for Barney, one that he meant to temper with Boche bullets. But when he sent the ace picture-snatcher on a death mission, Morrison didn't know there was more than one way to fill an assignment!

Bag o' Wind

By RALPH TARBOT

Author of "Two Men and a War" and "You Gotta Live Up to Medals"

"IF Black Jack Pershing told me to get a close-up of Kaiser Bill in his bath, I'd have the wet print in his hands by sundown."

So trumpeted Barney Gatling to the assembled pilots and photographers in the Plovers' mess hall. Barney's motto was "Blatt your own trombone or they'll

never know you're there." He had been a staff photographer on a newspaper. Now he was a backseat ace with camera and machine gun, and star of the Photographic Section, U. S. Signal Corps.

A rumble of mirth greeted Barney's declaration. Then came a challenging note.

through the ring of pilots to where he was standing at the head of the table. The photographer's eyes were blazing.

"Listen, Steve," he said. "It's all right to hand me a hot dish and make it look like a volunteer job, but you can't frame that kid. If he wants to quit when I tell him the truth, he quits—get me?"

"Look out, Gatling," the Skipper warned. "Don't go too far."

"You'd better watch your own stick and rudder or you'll be nosing for a crash," Barney rapped in reply.

He turned without waiting for Morrison's reply and grasped Larry Flood by the arm. He led the youngster out of doors and then began speaking in quick, sober sentences.

"Get this, kid," he began. "I saw that play coming and tried to keep you out of it. You don't have to go. In fact, I'd like to force Steve's hand and—"

"But gosh, Barney, I want to go. If we get away with something the Frogs fell down on, it'll show that we Americans are better than they are."

"But supposing we don't?"

Larry smiled. "Then we won't be any worse off than a lot of fellows I've known," he answered.

Barney grinned and slapped the youngster's shoulder. "Okay, kid. You're a gamester," was all he could say.

Gatling knew the danger into which he and Larry Flood would fly. The sector marked on their co-ordinated maps as L-M—23-24 had been a mystery which the Allies had been trying to penetrate for weeks. The French had attempted repeatedly to get photographs of the back area, but their best birdmen had been turned back or crashed.

He hustled to the map room opening off the mess hall to see what information he could get, but little data of value was available. It was known that the Boche were making secret preparations of some kind within that sector, but that was all. Even the maps were out of date. None showed the disposition of the archie batteries that were known to ring that heavily-guarded territory. Neither was the position of any of the defending air fields indicated.

BARNEY'S next step was to hold a short conference with Major Colby, commander of a squadron of Spads using the same landing field as the camera crew. To him he outlined his problem and received a promise of co-operation. Then he visited the Salmson two-seater that would take them across the lines. In addition to the regulation equipment of swivel-mounted Lewis guns and a wide-angle floor camera, Barney installed an automatic Browning rifle and his battered newspaper Graflex, a souvenir of his tabloid days.

He tapped the young pilot on the shoulder just before he gave the Salmson the gun.

"Remember, kid, no matter what we run into, I'm back here with both guns blazing. And when I blaze, something falls."

Larry nodded and the Salmson's engine bellowed. A cheer marked their departure. Pilots and photographers waved their hands in farewell as the two-seater left the ground. Barney looked back to see Steve Morrison standing in the doorway leading to the orderly room. He thumbed his nose at him and then turned to study the map of the district they would penetrate. He bawled instructions through the speaking tube, and Flood took the Salmson up to past the twenty-thousand-foot level before they crossed the lines.

Barney glanced at his watch as they neared the sector that had cost the French so many ships, then called to Larry to cruise and they swept off in a wide circle that took them into French territory. Gatling paid small heed to the ground below. He was interested in the winds of that high level. Down on the ground it was blowing steadily from the west. Up there, half a gale was coming from the opposite direction.

"It's always this way," the photographer mumbled, "I tried to tell Steve about it, but he was afraid I'd get away with something."

The Salmson headed into the German back area and Barney raised his field glasses to scan the district to the west. He caught glimpses of narrow wings flying in formation far below them.

Major Colby was bringing his Spads into Hunland to keep the rendezvous.

He bellowed into the tube once more and the Salmson shot ahead. Now his binoculars were directed toward the ground. Green appeared everywhere. He could see no sign of archie posts, airdromes, roads, or trenches. The territory seemed bare of all life and devoid of activity.

Barney Gatling nodded. He knew what that markless expanse meant. Camouflage covered everything worth seeing. Only photographs would show how great a concentration the Germans were preparing. Enlarged and patched together, they would tell a tale worth reading. The ubiquitous green could trick the eye, but not the camera. Trees, buildings, and fences cast shadows in conformity with the sun. Painted canvas does not.

"Ready, kid?" he called through the tube.

Larry Flood looked around, grinning. "Sure am," he yelled.

"Then let her buck."

The Salmson's tail flicked up and they plunged toward earth, the powerful motor tugging them onward with the aid of gravity. They were diving into the maw of hell, yet not a flame was seen. Faster, still faster. The wind screamed through the braces, shrieking like a soul in torment. Barney Gatling gauged the ground below with straining eyes. He knew the peaceful scene was but a painted picture. His face was strained and set.

"There she blows," he yelled as a black blob broke off to the right. "Now watch things happen."

An instant later a score of bursting plumes spread out just below them. Flashes of fire told him they would be ringed by bursting shells before they were within photographing distance.

A tornado of shrapnel and high explosive had broken around them. Barney Gatling had been through many storms of archie fire, but none like this. He marveled that the Salmson was not torn to bits, like so many of the French planes that had penetrated that forbidden area.

"Now for the blackbirds from hell!" he bellowed.

TWO full formations of pursuit planes were angling up to meet them. They had appeared out of nothingness. Far-flung camouflage had screened their hangars and a section of their landing field. They were on the wing before coming into sight. Barney flashed a glance toward the west. Major Colby's Spads were already engaged, but their presence had drawn only a part of the Boche aerial defense.

"Fritz must be starting something big down here," Gatling reflected. "Well, we'll know before long. That is, if—"

A blast came that all but tore the Salmson from the sky. Barney grabbed up the speaking tube to yell into Larry's ear.

"Stand her on her nose, kid. We've got to get down and away a damn sight faster than ever before. This place is poison."

The pilot nodded, and the biplane dropped into a vertical dive. The sky was black with bursting H.E. through which sped shell fragments and shrapnel bullets.

Barney braced himself, leaning back, his feet against Larry Flood's seat. The German planes were climbing rapidly. They would begin firing in another moment or two. There were enough of them to smother the Salmson, but Gatling paid little attention to them. He was examining his plate-holders. This done, he looked to the Lewis guns. They were ready.

"Don't forget I'm back here, kid," was his final assurance through the tube. "You watch the front end and I'll look after tail, sides, and bottom."

Larry Flood nodded, but did not look around.

The Salmson was dropping like a meteor. So great was its speed that it pierced the cordon of upward flying Boche before the enemy realized it. The earth leaped upward with ever-increasing speed. Gatling gazed at the slender, youthful figure in the pilot's seat. Only a kid, yet game to the core. Few seasoned flyers would have dared to make a dive like that.

Barney's homely face was taut, its heavy lines more deeply etched. He bent

over his floor camera and prepared it for action. Then he drew the slide from the Graflex. They were almost down. A shudder went through the Salmson as Flood began to pull up. They could feel the tough rived spruce straining against the tremendous pressure of the wind. The tail came down slowly.

Gatling worked with frantic speed as soon as they were on even keel. The floor camera was pointing toward the heavily camouflaged territory the Germans were guarding with such zeal. He snapped the shutter, replaced the plates, and then shot again. They had come down on the farther side of the secret sector and now were streaking at dizzy speed for the place where Major Colby's Spads were fighting two Boche formations.

Skilled by years of photographic experience, the cameraman exposed one plate after another. Developed and fitted together, they would form a composite picture of the secret area. Experts in the ground laboratories would study large, posterlike prints and learn the extent of the German preparations.

The Salmson was streaking westward with the speed of a pursuit ship, its powerful engine turning over at a rate Barney believed impossible for that type of motor.

"We're going to make it," he bellowed, glancing ahead.

Another blast came this time from the left. A second Boche, an Albatros, was gunning at them. A trio of waspish Pfalzes dropped from above. Larry Flood's cowl guns were jabbering, blasting a path through a line of German planes. A cloud of black-crossed ships had massed around the American biplane, and their machine guns were aflame. Barney had expected this. It was part of the game he was playing, but the number of their enemies was more than he had anticipated. Still, the French had sent over groups of camera crates, hoping one would get through. None had.

"I've got the pictures," Gatling thought. "But reaching the dark room is going to be a tough job."

He jerked loose the pin holding the Lewis guns in place and swung them

into action. A blast ripped a Rumpler's wing until it buckled, and turned upon an Albatros two-seater that was nosing in for the killing shot. The trays of his twin weapons spun. The Albatros half-wheeled and then limped away, staggering drunkenly.

THE GERMAN archies had ceased firing. They feared striking one of their own craft. Their airplanes, however, swarmed closer, darting at the speeding Salmson, throwing burst after burst. Barney changed trays and the Lewises clattered again. He could hear Larry Flood firing, his cowl guns jabbering steadily, but he could not turn to watch the effect of his shots. With the Lewis trays empty again, he snatched up his long-barrelled Browning automatic and drove off a Fokker that had come down with a rush.

The Salmson was lurching. It had been struck repeatedly. If the old boat would only hold together, they might have a chance. Larry Flood was piloting with the coolness of a seasoned veteran. Success was not far away.

"We'll make it if—"

The clangor of a long-drawn Spandau burst, broke in on Gatling's words. The Salmson shuddered, then pitched violently. Next it was tumbling, entirely out of control. Barney spun in his cubby to see Larry Flood slump forward, struggling at the same time to get hold of the madly whanging stick. The youngster had been hard hit.

The Boche were quick to see the plight of the helpless Salmson. They rushed in, their number swelling, flaying the staggering craft. Barney Gatling fixed his Lewis guns with a quick twist and then leaned over Flood's slumped shoulders to grasp the stick. He steadied it and then hauled back, bringing up the nose.

"Can you work the rudder bar?" he yelled into the youngster's ear.

Larry nodded feebly.

More Boche, each striving to put in the burst that would send them to destruction. Barney could not fight them off. Unless he held fast to the stick, the Salmson would go into a spin. He looked

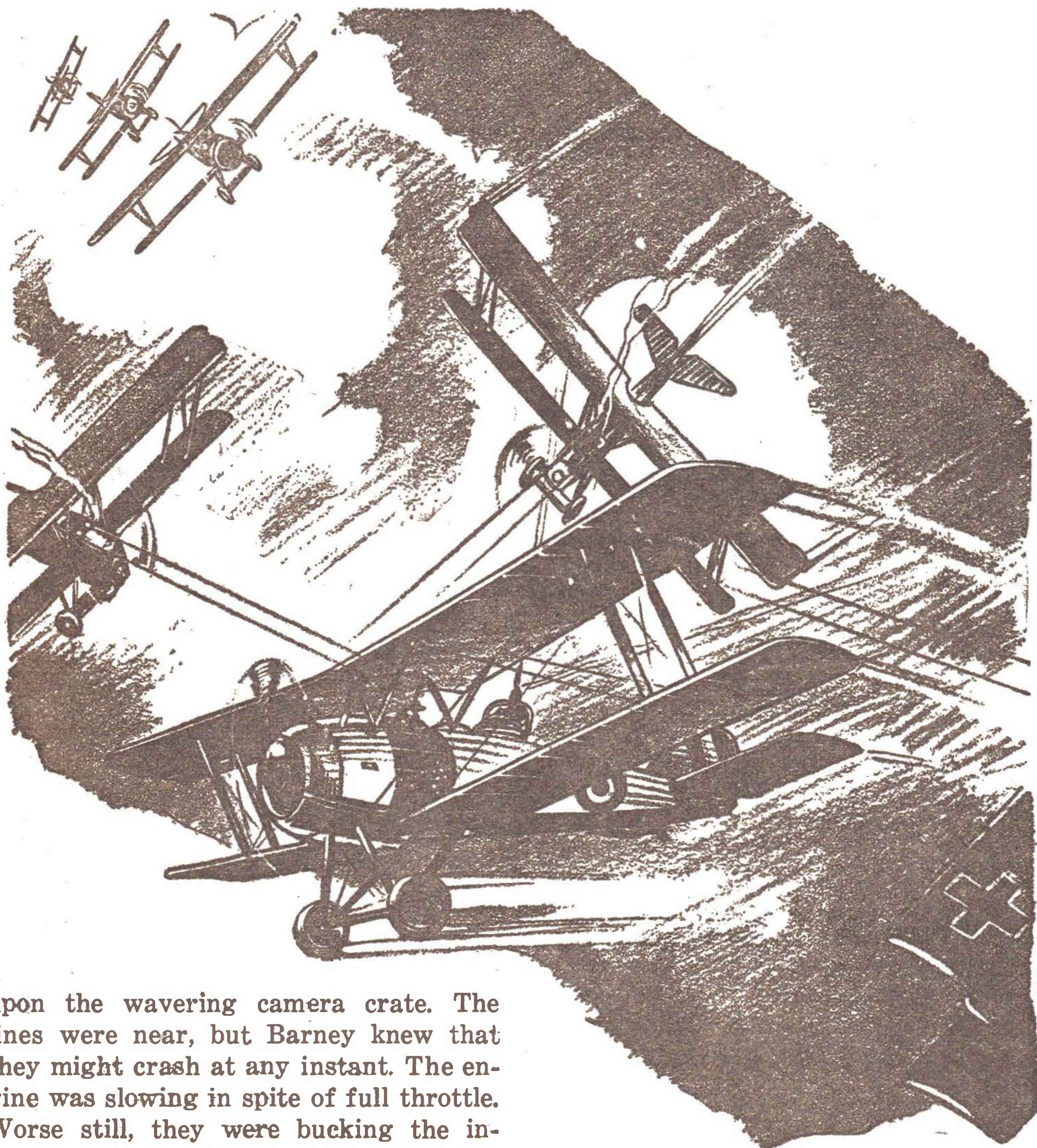
ahead at the oncoming Spads. Safety was near, yet as distant as the stars. Colby's entire formation was on its way, yet death might strike at any second.

The Spads arrived and circled them, trying to drive off the enemy—but they were outnumbered three to one. More Germans appeared, turning their guns

planes to hold up the nose, while Larry Flood could keep the rudder bar level.

Swelling bursts assailed them. For a moment the cameraman feared one wing would buckle. They slid across the lines into American territory, but the Boche followed, blasting them.

Then came a crash that ripped open the



upon the wavering camera crate. The lines were near, but Barney knew that they might crash at any instant. The engine was slowing in spite of full throttle. Worse still, they were bucking the invariable head wind from the west, the *bête noir* of the pilot with a badly mauled ship.

Another formation of Americans appeared and barged into the fight, but they were not enough to make the Germans give ground. On the contrary, the Boche attack became more furious. Barney Gatling was no pilot, but he knew enough of

cowling and dealt the motor a finishing blow. Its roar was silenced and the prop stopped turning. The Salmson settled rapidly, pancaking toward the pitted ground. Gatling glanced down. He would have to land on a terrain that would tax the skill of the most seasoned pilot. He eased forward to gain more head speed.

A final blast from the Boche riddled the partly shredded rudder. The Salmson's descent increased in speed. Barney held back, trying to keep the nose up. A last, frantic effort and he dropped the tail slightly. They hit with a crash that told of trucks shorn off and shattered empennage. With a plunging leap, the ship cracked up.

Barney Gatling leaped out and dragged Larry from the wreckage. He carried him into a shell hole a hundred yards from the piled-up Salmson. Shells were coming over from the German side.

"How are you, kid?" the man asked, bending over the boy. A dark spot showed upon the pilot's flying suit. "I'll have you in a dressing station toot sweet. Then you'll be okay."

Larry shook his head slowly. His lips moved, and Gatling bent lower.

"Thanks for giving me credit on that Fokker yesterday," the kid managed to say. "I shouldn't have let you do it, but I wanted so to—to get started."

"Hell, that was your Boche, not mine," Barney boomed. "Do you think I'd cheat myself? What's more, you're going to get plenty of Boche and have a little brass star and—"

He paused as Larry Flood shook his head, this time more feebly.

"Did we get—get those pictures?" the pilot asked.

"All in the can, Buddy. My old Graflex got knocked for a loop, but we sure showed up those Frogs. It takes Americans to cop first time out, like that."

"Gee, that's swell. I'm—" The boy's voice trailed off into a whisper and then stopped.

Barney bent lower, to gaze into Larry's eyes. A glaze had come over them.

"Hey, kid, listen—I'm going to—"

A faint smile came to the youngster's lips. Then his mouth relaxed.

"Listen, kid, listen, I—" Barney Gatling stopped, staring unbelievably at the still figure before him. Larry Flood was dead.

TWIN spots of red appeared upon the photographer's leathery cheeks. He stripped off his flying suit and spread it

over Larry's body. Then he scrambled out of the shell hole and raced to the battered Salmson. Larry had gone West, and he could do nothing for him. Now his duty called for swift action. He must get the plates in. Then he would call on Steve Morrison.

"Maybe Chaumont won't sit up when I bring in the prints," he reflected. "Maybe they won't—"

Gatling's jaw dropped. The wide-lensed camera in the Salmson's floor had been riddled by a burst from German guns. Not only had the machine been ripped to pieces, but every plate carrier had been smashed to pieces. Another photographic plane had tried to penetrate the Boche secret—and had failed. After what he had been through, Barney knew no ship could weather the leaden storm the Germans would hurl upon it.

He turned to look back at the body in the shell hole. Larry Flood had died vainly. If Steve Morrison had only listened to the plan Gatling had tried to offer, the youngster would be alive.

"Now I've got to try that gag," the photographer told himself. "It's the only way we'll ever get the pictures."

He dashed across the uneven ground to slide into a communication trench. Half an hour later he was back to where a line of captive observation balloons were tugging at their mooring lines, fighting the strong breeze from the west. Up in the higher altitudes, a gale was blowing in the opposite direction.

"Wind bags, huh?" Barney was tromboning again, as he gazed at the bobbing sausages. "Hello, brother. Maybe you and I can work together."

He quickly got in touch with the commander of the balloon company. Next he put in a telephone call that went straight through to Chaumont. Word flashed back, giving him *carte blanche*. Headquarters wanted photographs of the German secret area and would do anything to get them.

A buzz of activity went through the balloon command when Gatling got into action. A pot-bellied kite was inflated with hydrogen until its sides threatened to

burst. Its basket was loaded with sand bags until no more could be installed. Meantime a plane flew from the photographic airdrome with fresh plates and cameras.

Major Colby of the Spad pursuit formation dropped down in compliance with orders from Chaumont, and once more he and Gatling went into conference. This time, however, their plan was widely different. Barney's final act was to call up Captain Morrison.

"I'll have those plates ready for you by evening, Cap," he bassooned into the transmitter.

An exclamation of startled surprise came over the wire.

"And," the photographer continued in the same bellowing note, "I'd advise you to take a walk about the time I bring them in."

"What do you mean by that?" the skipper demanded hotly.

"Stick around and you'll find out," Barney answered.

Late afternoon had come before he clambered into the snugly packed balloon basket. It had required time to prepare it. The floor camera had to be fitted into the bottom, a task requiring painstaking care. Another long-barreled Browning automatic rifle was loaded into the tiny compartment. Then he gave his final instructions to the ground crew.

"Make it look like a break-away," he ordered. "There's plenty of breeze. So long—I'll be seeing you."

"But how are you going to get back?" one man yelled.

"Just leave that to us wind bags," Barney answered.

THE balloon surged upward, straining at its leash. The wind quickened as the sun declined. Barney flicked a signal and the wire rope parted. Next the balloon was scudding toward the German lines.

Gatling peered over the basket's edge as they entered enemy territory. He had gauged the direction of the wind correctly and was nearing the closely guarded area. He would soon know if his plan would work or had been just a plate-

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shooter's dream. Several Pfalz and Albatros planes were skimming through the air in his direction. One blast of their inflammable bullets, and both the balloon and his project would be exploded.

The Boche drew nearer. The sausage was drifting swiftly, hardly more than three hundred feet above ground. Barney made a series of hurried photographs showing the first section of the secret area, but he straightened up and waved frantically as the airplanes neared. One swept in to where he could see the pilot's face clearly. Gatling pointed to the trailing cable and held his hands aloft.

"*Kamerad,*" he bawled, although he knew the noise of the German motor would drown his word.

The man at the stick nodded and pointed to the ground. He was ordering Barney down. The American bobbed his head and valved a little gas. It hissed out under pressure and the big bag settled slightly, but he stopped the outflow before much elevation was lost.

He took more photographs through the bottom of the basket. More German airplanes wheeled about him, gesturing him down. Barney worked rapidly. If he could only keep them off for a few minutes! The shadows were lengthening. He had time for only a few more pictures. The helpless sausage drifted on, sinking lower as the air cooled. Gatling looked back toward the American lines. A smile widened his homely mouth.

He glanced at the planes that had been circling about him. They had spun and were racing toward the west. Others were streaking in the same direction. Major Colby had arrived with his formation.

In its center was a Salmson, apparently carrying a camera. The Boche were blasting the sky with shrapnel, while black-crossed planes attacked in droves. Colby retreated, drawing the enemy after him. The sausage scudded on, crossing the district the Germans were protecting at every cost.

The light was graying when Barney exposed the last plate. Next he entered a sector that was not under guard, and he began to feed sand from the ballast

bags. The balloon swept upward. Filled with hydrogen until on the verge of explosion, the giant shape leaped as its burden was lightened. A tingle went through the cameraman, and his taut face relaxed.

"If Morrison had only listened in the beginning," he mumbled, "Larry would be alive and—"

His words froze as he caught sight of a Rumpler buzzing toward him. He was climbing rapidly, but the balloon's speed was no match for an airplane. The two-seater drew near, apparently studying the kite. A flicker of light showed in the graying dusk. Next came the sound of sputtering Spandaus. Barney Gatling whipped out his Browning automatic, and sent a burst that made the Rumpler dodge. It spun and lunged again, but the Browning shot a drag that struck the after-controls, and the two-seater wavered uncertainly.

A BURST of colored lights came from the German cockpit. The pilot was calling for aid. His ship had been damaged, but he would keep contact with the balloon until other planes arrived.

Barney unloaded his ballast as fast as he could. He did not take time to spill the sand from the bags, but threw them out unopened. The sausage was leaping skyward, but the Rumpler labored in its wake. The ship was too much damaged to maneuver readily, but it clung to the rapidly ascending balloon.

Higher, still higher it went, and swept into a strong wind blowing from the east. Barney's plan was working. He was being carried back toward the lines. He peered through the rapidly thickening shadows to see several airplanes coming up to join the Rumpler. More signal lights appeared. He turned to hurl the last of the sand bags over the side.

Swaying and pitching in the heavy wind, the great bag raced toward American territory. Darkness came, but spurts of flame told Gatling that the airplanes were drawing closer and had opened fire. He made no attempt to reply. It was too dark to see clearly. The balloon was a large target, while the planes were scarce-

ly visible. He glanced down to see the white lights of the front-line trenches. He was almost over them. Soon he would be above friendly ground, but, as he congratulated himself, a burst of Spandau cracked out from a point less than a hundred yards away. Barney raised the Browning, only to lower it again. No use firing—the flames of the weapon would only mark his own position.

Another burst came from the pursuing Germans. They were drawing in from all directions. No-Man's-Land slid beneath him. Next he was above American territory.

Now one Boche plane was diving down, straight for the balloon, its guns rattling steadily. Barney stared aloft. He saw a flicker as a crimson thread ran up the envelope. The fabric was afire. He had not escaped, after all.

In another moment the well-doped outer surface was blazing. The hydrogen would explode any second. Barney gathered up the floor camera with its prize packet of plates and strapped them to his body. Then he stepped over the edge of the basket into space.

A mighty roar echoed above as he tumbled through the air. The balloon had detonated. A flag of flame was flung across the darkened sky, then disappeared. A jerk threatened to tear his arms from his body. The parachute had opened.

TWO HOURS later Barney Gatling entered the orderly room in which Captain Steve Morrison held high court. He found his commander seated at his desk.

"So you thought you'd hand me a stunt I couldn't do?" Barney's voice could be heard in the most distant hangar. "Well, here are the plates—a full set of them."

"Good work, Gatling. Congratulations," the skipper managed to say.

"Razzberry to you," the photographer responded. "Called me a wind bag, didn't you? Well, me and a brother wind bag from the sausage corps went over there and copped those pictures. We shot the works. I tried to tell you about the gag

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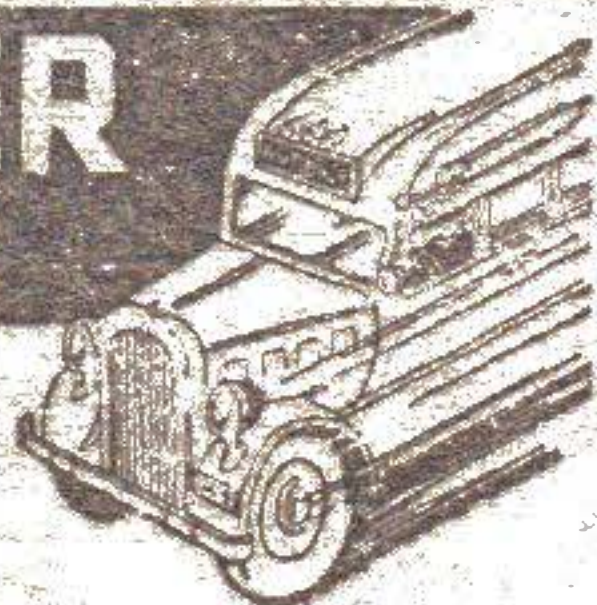
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this morning, but you couldn't spare the time."

Barney's tones were loud, and the pilots, photographers, and hangar crews outside did not have to strain their ears.

"Where's Flood?" Morrison asked. "Didn't he come back with you?"

The cameraman's boastful expression faded. His flushed face went white. His eyes tightened into a threatening squint.

"You lousy white rabbit," he shot back in a throaty tone. "If you hadn't been so anxious to hand me a hot dish, that kid would be alive today. He was the swell-est, bravest little devil who ever grabbed a joystick. You murdered that kid, Morrison — bumped him off when you were trying to get me."

"Listen here, Gatling," the captain barked. "You can't get away with that kind of stuff. I'm Skipper of this outfit and I could throw you up against a court martial for talk like that."

"Yeah? Getting technical, aren't you? That's what a louse like you would do."

Captain Steve Morrison grabbed his automatic and raced around the corner



of the desk, his eyes blazing. He raised his gun, but something struck him in the jaw that stretched him on the floor. The weapon fell with a clatter.

Barney Gatling licked his bleeding knuckles and turned toward the door. He looked down at the figure of his commanding officer. The captain was stirring, making feeble efforts to rise. The cameraman strode out into the darkness. Across the field he could see a dark knot of figures in the shadow of the hangars.

"Hey, you guys!" he called like the trombone in a circus band blatting on a smeared note. "Get a doctor and a couple of stretcher-bearers. There's a guy inside who's just had a stroke. Called me a wind bag. It's an ill wind bag that blows no good."